

Brothers in Steel

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Summary: The Master Chief finds himself in the world of Mass Effect. This is my attempt at bridging two things I love and fixing the ending of Mass Effect 3. Complete.

1. Chance

Brothers of Steel â€" A Halo/ Mass Effect Cross Over

Chapter One: Chance.

"Wake me up, when you need me." Was the last thing the Master Chief, Spartan John 117 said to Cortana, the Artificial Intelligence that had bonded with him. She was full of attitude, but due to her advanced structure, she had become human, in her emotions. She had formed affection for humanity, but John in particular. In a way, she was his only real friend.

She was unable to sleep, her kind had never been designed to. She would have to wait, in the cold of space, waiting for the time that would they reach a human colony or a ship that would take them back to earth. The Ark, now destroyed, was located at the very edge of the galaxy, and they were hurtling through Dark Space, an area where nothing existed, no light or anything, but due to their prescence, they gave it form and mass.

She would have to sit there, in the cold dark of space, and think to herself. To many AI who were stranded for long periods of time, this caused an AI to go insane, and not be able to function with organic beings. This would cause problem. But while she stood in her portal, controlling the ship, the ship no longer having any slipspace capabilities, she could think back and go over the information she had been given from the first halo ring.

She formed in her head the worlds of the fore runners, and pictured herself moving and walk in them, looking at the beauty but

functionality of their designs, their complex equations, and how they viewed the universe.

And for five years she lost herself in the world, not thinking of anything, not even considering that in her paradise she was forcing herself to become rampant, becoming more and more detached in her virtual reality. But then, a warning from the ship, woke her up.

She had been sitting in a field of grass reading a book, underneath a star lit sky. Then, she woke up, bringing her existence back into reality. And she saw what they were moving into. And it was time to wake up the Chief.

She stopped the cryo and called out.

"Chief, wake up!"

And then he woke up.

John felt the pain of the ice on his skin cracking but ignored it. He then got up and turning the flashlights on his helmet on, "What's the matter."

"There's a slip space rupture, I don't know how it got here, maybe a ship's reactor imploded on itself and formed it, but its large enough that its pulling us in!"

"Looks like we have no choice but to go in."

"But we don't know what's on the other side!."

"Didn't you already know that, Cortana?"

"I know, but,"

"You were hoping I had an answer, its ok. We'll get through this."

In chief's head he knew to himself there was a good chance they would not survive. He knew that this was the end, and he saw his life flash before his eyes, and though to himself, its funny because that never happened when I was fighting the Covenant or the Flood. And then he saw it, a life where he had never been given a choice, only given impossible odd after impossible odd, and forced to comply. He had fought the Insurrectionists, then he had fought the covenant, then he had fought the Flood, and then he had rested, but now he was being thrust against his will once again, to a new place. Where would it take him? He didn't know if he wanted to know. And then they were plunged into the rupture.

Urdnot Wrex and Urdnot Thurk looked up at the stars. They saw a strange purple flash in the night sky as something hurtled down into the atmosphere of Tuchanka. Alarmed, Wrex told his scout Captain Thurk to take a squad and check it out. They responded with a salute and moved out.

Master Chief was dreaming.

He dreamt that he was on his homeworld of Eridanus.

He dreamt that he was being taken away, taken to the Spartan facility.

He dreamt of Dr. Halsey.

He dreamt of the injections, and the torture, and the pain.

Then Dr. Halsey spoke in the voice of the Gravemind,

"Are you too weak to fight, are you too weak to choose?"

Then he woke up.

He was in a dimly lit cavern. He said, Cortana! But no answer. Was it possible she had become detached from him, then that was when he noticed that he had no armor. He looked around in the cavern and saw a hunched being by a fire, roasting some sort of meat on a spit. He got up and then it turned around.

The Being looked at him, and it was unlike anything the Chief had ever seen.

It reminded him of a dinosaur, but not in the same way the elites did, no, it was an alien that had a hunched back, and a forehead that rose in a bony plated crest. It had eyes on the front of its face like a normal biped, but it had a mouth that curved around its elongated face. It opened its mouth and said, in a language that somehow he knew, "Well look, the human wakes. Clan leader Wrex, he is awake."

John looked around him and saw another one, this one much bigger and having a different style of body armor. It said in a much deeper and venomous voice, "Ah so it has. Tell us human, why should we not kill you now. It is only of respect of your kind that I even allowed you to live this long."

"Um, I am not your enemey for one, and I am disarmed, as you have seen fit to do," replied John, uncertain of his odds of fighting the strange creatures.

"Answer me a question," said the one named wrex, "Who the hell are you? Your armor is unlike any I have ever seen. And you had an AI, which are illegal in council space, in your suit. We removed the chip that it was in from your armor, but we got to talk to it, and it threatened us."

"That would be typical," said John, looking at his pale skin.

"Answer the question."

John replied, "I don't think you would believe me."

"Try me, I've done a lot of things that most people wouldn't believe."

"Well to be honest I don't even know where I am. I am Petty Officer John 117 of the United Nations Space Command. I'm a Spartan II, and I was probably reported missing in action after the battle of the Ark."

The alien looked at him with an air of dumbfoundness. Then it said, "Hmmm. I don't even know what those things are. Could you give a little explanation before I deem you insane and shoot your head off."

"Right, well, do you know of Earth?"

"Earth? Of course, the humans are the second most powerful race in the galaxy, in terms of political and economics, not as powerful as us on the battlefield though they got the resources to back themselves up."

"Okay, so does the United Nations Space Command still exist?"

"Thurk, do you know anything from reading the damn extranet about a United Nations Space Command?"

"No, I don't remember such a thing ever existing. Just the Alliance."

"The Alliance?"

"Don't tell me you don't know of the Alliance!" Shouted Wrex.

"Okay I don't, I can't really understand what's going on here. I'm a Petty Officer, a Spartan dammit. My ship was the last ship out of the Ark before it exploded. Nobody knows about that? Nobody knows of the war with the Covenant and the Flood?"

"The Covenant, the Flood?" shouted Wrex, "what the hell are those things?"

"The covenant was our first enemy, an alliance of alien races, no offense, they threatened to destroy us all, since we were heretics in the eyes of their religious leaders. And the Flood were parasites, and they threatened to destroy the galaxy."

Thurk looked at Wrex and they turned around, whispering. Chief then decided to be bold, "Listen, I can obviously tell you think I'm insane."

"With good reason, you are making up stories, but what I want to know is who made your armor. Its shields are much stronger than anything we have, it offers the same protection of a biotic barrier with an underlying layer of armor.

"Plus, it had an AI in it, AI are illegal."

That was so far the weirdest thing that he had encountered, in the UNSC AIs were beloved. How could they be illegal in the galaxy now?

"Ok, I've told you what I know about my situation. After the battle of the Ark I drifted into a slipspace portal and now I've been teleported here."

"A Slipspace portal?," wondered Wrex.

Then Thurk said, "That wouldn't happen to be the purple flash we saw in the night sky would it?"

"Yeah." Said John.

"Okay what are you then?"

"A Spartan."

"A Spartan, what is that."

John was surprised they had never heard of the Spartans, if they had heard of Earth, and the Human Alliance , which had to be what the UNSC was calling itself now. These new aliens must have never been encountered until later. Then John replied, "We are soldiers. The best."

All the aliens laughed.

"the best soldiers?" Mocked one of the aliens, " no human has ever proven themselves to be considered a warrior , none our better than us."

"Except for Shepard," said Wrex.

"Yes, Shepard."

John outburst, "So what are you going to do with me?"

Wrex answered, "You say you are a warrior, prove it. Wrestle with Thurk. If you beat him, we will let you have your armor back. Lose, and I will let him eat you."

"He looks very nutritious," said Thurk.

"Yes," said Wrex, "Prove your skill."

John had no choice. If he didn't win, he would have to become a snack for these stupid aliens. And he needed to talk to Cortana. So he remembered the battles of strength he had with the Elites, and prepped himself for battle.

2. Challenge

Brothers in Steel Chapter 2: Challenge

Fighting one of these aliens was one thing Chief had not expected. He feared no opponent, but he doubted his success. These things were stronger than him, he didn't know their weak spots, he didn't know their terms for victory, and he didn't have his MJOLNIR Armor. It was going to be tough but he was going to find a way to win. Or die trying.

The Arena was circular, and all the troops of the one named Wrex gathered around, jeering and waiting for what they thought would be the inevitable defeat of an insane human.

John got on one side of the arena, and Thurk got in the other. John was wearing the blue body suit that all Spartans wear into combat,

while Thurk had decided to strip down completely other than a loin cloth. The idea of touching the thing was a little nauseating to the Chief, but he supposed that at least this wasn't a flood form.

John tried to remember what he learned about wrestling on Reach. Wrestling his other Spartans involved bringing them down to the mat and pinning down the opponent's shoulders and legs to the mat, and keeping them there for five seconds. He wondered what the aliens thought was sufficient for a wrestling match.

One alien, yelled loudly, his voice booming out for all to hear, "Alright, the rules are simple. The first opponent to have his arms pinned to the ground for more than five seconds, will be the loser, and the other will be the victor. All tactics are allowed except biting and eye gouging. Also if one of you leaves the arena, that one will be disqualified and eaten, regardless of race."

Wrex laughed, "We could be having you tonight Thurk."

"Heh." Said Thurk and locked eyes with John.

The Loud alien raised his arm up and said, "Let the fight begin."

John immediately decided to make his strategy to force Thurk outside the circle. Without his armor, he couldn't hope to over flip or pick up the alien, but maybe he could trip him and make him land outside the circle. John got into a back right stance, and put up his hands, ready to grapple. The Alien charged without any delay.

John barreled roll to the left, then quickly got up and crouched low.

Thurk had stopped himself before leaving the circle and then turned around and roared. Then he said, "Ah, so you are more nimble than I imagined."

"I've had practice," replied John.

"Good, like hunting Pyjaks."

Thurk charged again and this time John barreled roll to the side again but then jumped on the back of Thurk, who was set off balance for a second but recovered and decided to jump backwards and use his bony plated head to impale John. John realized this as he started to back off, but it was too late, and the head crashed into his chest with a thud.

The wind wasn't knocked out of John, he had taken similar hits, but it didn't feel good. The Alien got back up and then turned around and back slapped John who almost got sent outside the circle. Then Thurk ran at him again, roaring, and John knew exactly what to do. He slid to the ground and put his leg in front of the alien's foot. The sheer weight of the alien ensured that he would get some distance and half of his body landed outside the circle.

A bell rang.

Wrex laughed, and the rest were shocked. Thurk started to yell with savage barbarity and ran at John, charging full head into his chest,

this time taking John's breath away. What happened next puzzled John. Wrex shot a blue wave of energy at Thurk who then bounced off John and into a wall. The other soldiers went up to Thurk and picked him up, saying, "Dinner! Dinner! Dinner!"

All left but Wrex, who then offered John his hand, pulling him up. He said, "to be honest, at first I was going to stop my men from eating Thurk, he's' pretty smart, I could use him. But he dishonored himself by attacking you after the contest was over. So tonight, you may join us in our feast if you wish, or you can take your armor and go."

"I think that will be good. I'm not sure about eating my enemies, but I suppose there's no other food elsewhere."

"Good," said Wrex.

John followed him and said bluntly, "What are you?"

"We? We are Krogan, the warriors of Tuchanka."

"Is Tuchanka this planet?"

"Yes, it is a barren nuclear wasteland, but we call it home."

"I see, what was the little magic trick you pulled."

"Biotics, I'm guessing you don't know what those are too."

"No, I'm a little hazy on that."

"Certain individuals can tap into sources of Dark Energy through implants in their body. Asari can do it naturally, but most others have to have had exposure to Element Zero in Gestation, or whatever they go through before birth. I got it in the latter method."

"Right, that would definitely have a practical use."

"Heh. I could tell you were a soldier, the way you think. So how about we eat Thurk, and then you can get your armor back?"

John nodded.

He led John to their camp, and he looked at the Forward Unto Dawn crashed in the Planet. It reminded him of the crash of the Pillar of Autumn that he saw on the First Halo ring. He wondered how long he had been dormant inside the Ship until these aliens came and got him. He hadn't been in Cyro, but soon he would talk to Cortana and maybe she could tell him something he didn't.

They gave him a bowl of Thurk. While eating his enemies was not something he wanted to do, it was indeed tasty.

After that, he walked up to where they were keeping his armor. It hadn't been damaged, thank God, but it seemed to look different to him. Maybe the rules of time and space were different or something, but it seemed more round, if that was possible. He wondered why that was.

He put each part on, and then looked at the inside of his helmet.

Then he slipped it on. He wondered how he was going to get his shields recharged, but seeing as they were fully charged now, he would worry about that later. He put it on and it turned on, giving him a full readout of his shield strength to the top. He was also out of dispensers of Bio Foam in his suit. That was going to be the biggest problem, because if he got injured, attacked by one of those monstrous Krogan he couldn't get wounded. He had to find out if they had any substances like it. He asked Wrex and Wrex said, "Krogan natural heal their organs over time, but most other races use medi-gel which is similar to your Biofoam."

"Civilians use medi-gel where I come from, but I'll have to find some."

"You'll need an omni-tool to dispense that."

"Omni Tool?"

"Yeah... I can't explain it, I'm sure that damned merchant back in the city can tell you how to get one. Pretty much all humans have one; I used to have one back when I was adventuring."

This was so much to take in, but Master Chief kept himself to speed. Now all he needed was Cortana. He hoped that removing her while his suit was deactivated wouldn't harm her in anyway. He didn't think he'd be able to survive long in this new galaxy without her help. Wrex handed John the chip with her intelligence on it, and he inserted it in the back of his helmet.

After a slight delay he heard her voice, "Chief, it's so good to see that you are alive."

"You too. You got any theories how we got here."

"The influx of energies in Slipspace must have ripped a hole in the space time continuum. This may be a wild guess..butâ€|"

"Tell me. I need to know."

Wrex was looking from a distance, as were a couple other krogan. It appeared to them that the Chief was talking to himself.

"I think we may have gone to another dimension."

"Another Dimension?"

"Yes."

"You mean another plane of existence? But the Krogan mentioned Earth."

"Well, in an alternate dimension, everything would be the same, just there would be differences in who populated it. Laws of physics still apply here. But the problem is that there is a whole different schema of technology in this universe. I'm worried that we won't be able to find a way to charge your shields, and more importantly, I may be stuck in your suit forever."

"It could be possible. About my shields, well, I guess I will have to get used to it. Or maybe modify this armor with the technology in

this universe. Or maybe get some new armor."

"But then I wouldn't have a home remember?"

"Right, well one problem at a time I guess."

He turned to Wrex, and said, "You got any idea where I should go to find some new armor."

"Heh, you can get armor anywhere, just not on Tuchanka, looks like you need to get off world. To the Citadel, is probably your best bet."

"The Citadel?"

"Right, I forgot you are supposedly ignorant to the functioning of our society, well the Citadel is the capital of the galaxy, and where you can get anything. Armor, guns, medi-gel, red sand, eezo, yeah all that good stuff. And seeing as you know how to handle yourself, you can probably become a mercenary, get hired by Aria, heard Cerberus took over her base."

"Alright, who would have transportation?"

"Ask the merchant, he's the only one who has got a ship. I have one, but I have no reason, and I can tell you are not looking for charity."

Cortana said only to chief, "It would sure as hell help."

Chief replied, "Yeah, I can handle it myself."

"Then I'll take you with us back to Urdnot in the truck. Think you can get that as another reward for the untimely death of Thurk."

"Right, sorry about that."

"Sorry? Don't be sorry, in our culture, we respect our enemies. Hell, our most hated ones are the ones that know our code, and we let them walk on our grounds."

John found this sort of logic a little comforting, they were a race that respected Strength.

If it was really true that he had been transported to another dimension, though, he would need to find a way to make sure that he could keep himself and Cortana alive. And since he was bound to bring attention to himself, he was going to have to become a civvie, walking around in his armor was sure to raise some eyebrows. But first he needed to find this merchant and get off planet. Then he would worry about surviving later. Secretly he hoped that there was something he could kill, because doing what he had been trained to do would offer a little comfort in an unfamiliar place.

3. Work

Chapter 3: Work

The truck that took them to the town of Urdnot was basically a big box with six wheels under it. The trip was very rough, as the truck driver continuously decided to keep driving over every bump on the highway. There was a small window port that John looked out of, and he saw the full extent of what Tuchanka looked like. It was a ruined planet, looked like to him that there had been a great war fought there. There was a haze of brown clouds in the sky, and he could see packs of feral animals feeding on the carcasses of stray animals.

John said to Wrex, "So what happened here?"

"Um, could you be more specific?"

"How'd it get like this, the ruin I mean."

"Nuclear war. Long ago, we learned the secret of nuclear fire. Then, we used it to kill each other. I was born long after that, a little sooner after we got the genophage."

"The Genophage?"

"That would take a couple hours we don't have to explain. But in short, it makes breeding near impossible. It was our punishment for trying to take over the galaxy. But its not what is killing us."

"You tried to take over the galaxy?"

"Yes. Didn't go well for us as you can see, heh."

John thought to himself, apparently he had crashed landed on the planet of a race of punished aggressive aliens. He wondered if this was the fate that the UNSC was going to give to the Elites, or the Grunts, or the Brutes, give them a biological weapon that made them unable to breed. It was probably for the best with these Krogan but he wondered if he would have done the same thing to his former allies.

When they got there, John could take a good long look at the ruined city. They walked into a cavernous building, and he saw many other Krogan, either working on fixing things, or just standing around and talking. Wrex walked over to a central podium under a shaft of light. He took a seat on a type of throne, and John surmised that it was possible that Wrex was the leader of this clan. He remembered that Wrex said that the only one who might be willing to take a human offworld, (and was able to), was the merchant. He wondered where he was.

Cortana said, "These people live in a extreme state of poverty."

"Yeah." Said Chief.

"In a way they should be helped but, according to that Wrex, they tried to conquer the galaxy. Makes me wonder what is going on between the Elites and the UNSC right now."

"Yeah. If they have any sense they'll at least wait a hundred years."

"Of course, knowing you, you'd fight anyway."

"Of course."

"What are you going to do, now that we don't have orders anymore?"

"Do what I always do, fight. We're not going to survive just by worrying about it."

"True, I'm glad you're the one making the decisions."

After an hour of searching, and some angry threats by Krogan just bumming around the city, he eventually found the Merchant, Ratch, who was apparently the only merchant in the entire town of Urdnot.

Ratch was a little shorter than most of the other Krogan he had seen, and he was minding what looked like a datapad. I guess some bits of technology in this dimension were similar. He went up to the Krogan but before he could utter a word the Krogan said, "I know who you are."

"And you know what I need?"

"Obviously. You need a way to the Citadel. And I can get it. But you need to do something for me in return. Got any suggestions?"

Cortana said, "Offer him salvage from the wreckage."

"Right, are you interested in any salvage from the wreckage of my ship?"

"Urdnot already lays claim to that. I will receive my share when I go out. You can not give me what is already mine."

"Well, now we got nothing," said Cortana.

"Uh, any work you need done?" said Chief.

Ratch smiled, or at least he looked as if he were smiling. "Funny you asked," he said. "I have a little problem that I was hoping you could take care of."

"Oh yeah?"

"The Pyjaks are getting into my food stores again. Last time we killed them off with the turrets. But that was just a temporary fix, and also we can't afford to pay someone to sit on the turret all day. So I've decided you are going to go into their next and kill all of them."

"Right. What direction is the nest?"

"Down the cavern, I think they are hiding out in one of the old trucks. Here, take one of the old shotguns. Not going to be able to catch them. Too fast. Make sure they all die though, they breed very quickly."

"Got it."

John jumped down from the Urdnot camp into the cavern, it took about fifteen minutes, but he found one of the old trucks. He took out the shotgun that the Krogan had gave him. In comparison to the old M90s that he had used many times on the Halo ring, the mechanism of the shotgun was a little more complicated. The Krogan had given him several things called Thermal clips, and after every shot, he would have to unhinge the barrel of the shotgun and insert a new thermal clip. This way seemed inefficient to the chief compared to conventional shotgun shells.

He pumped the shotgun and moved into the truck. The rusting metal creaked underneath his feet. The Krogan had not told the Chief what kind of animals they were, but only that they were stealing the food. John prepared to meet some kind of predator but instead was surprised when he saw a group of what had to be the animals, and they appeared to be a sort of lemur like creature.

Apparently it was a type of rodent infestation, and John put the sights of the shotgun, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

The shot hit its marks, taking out all three. But the recoil of the gone was so great, that the Chief was put off balance for a second. He hadn't expected the weapon to bounce back so far, more expecting it to be like the M90. He decided he would need to keep a firmer grip and a better stance if he were to be able to use the gun correctly. He continued to move deeper into the truck, looking for any sign of the Pyjaks. After an hour of searching, he didn't see any more Pyjaks, but wasn't convinced that he had killed all of them. So he took a seat below in the cargo hold of the abandoned truck and waited.

Cortana asked, "Enjoying yourself."

"Yeah. This is normal. Though they don't shoot back, which is a shame."

"Hah, no challenge makes John a dull boy."

"Something like that. I'm waiting for some to appear on my sensors. Okay, I see one red dot to the back of the truck above. Hopefully that's the last one, or at least it will lead me to the nest."

Chief got up and slowly snuck to the back, and saw a nest of them. There were three sleeping and one eating some food, obviously stolen from the stores. Chief aimed his shotgun, steadied himself, and then took a shot.

The sleeping Pyjaks were quickly decimated, and they were shredded apart by the blast. The eating Pyjak quickly scattered and ran up into the ventilation of the truck, and John lunged, and grabbed its tail. The creature squeaked. Then John pulled it and lifted it upside down. It squealed for a minute then John snapped its neck. Then he put it over his shoulder and left the truck. Cortana asked, "Keeping that as a trophy?"

"Nah, just need to prove that I did the job."

"Right."

He showed it to Ratch and Ratch said, "That better be the end of that human, but my shuttle leaves tomorrow morning. You can bunk in the warehouse until I'm ready to leave."

"Thanks."

"Sure, Alien."

That night, before John removed his armor to sleep on the floor of the warehouse he said to Cortana, "Do you think I should even bother finding a way home?"

"No, I doubt we can, unless someone tried to purposely blow up a slipspace engine. We'll have to find somewhere we can fit in."

"I'm not too worried about fitting in I just want to make sure I can keep you functional. Would be a shame if you survived all we've been through just to power down."

"You do know how to care for a girl don't you?" mused Cortana.

"I try my best. Good night."

"Good night."

4. Raid

****Sorry this one took a while, I couldn't figure out what to do next at first, and I also had school to do.****

****~Gehenna. ****

Chapter 4: Raid

The following morning, Chief was given an omni-tool by Ratch, for two reasons. The first being that Ratch upgraded and had no use for his first one, and second because he needed a way to talk to John when John would be hiding out in the cargo bay of the frigate that would take them to the Citadel. The frigate was called the ****Laedra****, and it was being run by a group of aliens known as Salarians. As best as John could tell, Ratch and most other Krogan hated them, due to their part in constructing the Genophage, but they were the only one picking up traders from Tuchanka that month. So they would have to do.

John and Ratch got on Ratch's shuttle and flew it off Tuchanka. Cortana said softly, "Well, we've left the **_Forward unto Dawn_** for good now."

"Yeah, they mentioned they were going to scrap it."

"Indeed."

"They will probably take all the SPUNKR launchers and all the Assault Rifles, and then wonder, how do they use them? Well then they'll probably melt it all down, because bullets are inferior to whatever weapons they use here."

Ratch interrupted, "Mass Accelerator is the name of the game here."

All weapons are a miniature mass accelerator, based off of the technology that built the mass relays. They used to have weapons that never ran out of ammunition, I loved that stuff, but then they stopped making them, because apparently having thermal clips made the weapons stronger. I still prefer having unlimited ammo though."

"Sounds more logical. Wonder why they switched."

The shuttle parked itself within the ship. The Salarians appeared to John to be sort of like frogs that had learned to walk on two legs. They were varied in color, some were red, others were brown, and a few were green and blue. They waved traffic cones toward the ship and Ratch slowly drove into the cargo bay.

"There's a Shadow Broker agent on this ship. I know him, its possible he could give you a fake identity. If you're willing to get your hands dirty for him."

"Shadow Broker?"

"Information dealer, crime lord, there was a rumor that he was taken down, but I guess that wasn't true, nothing changed anyways."

"So you want me to work for a crime lord?"

"I don't care what you do, human, I'm just giving you options. There's no life for you here. Wrex doesn't honestly believe your stupid ass story about coming from another dimension, but he knows that you are a fighter. So he had me give you information, that's my only job. Wrex is an honorable clan leader to be sure."

Ratch got out and the Captain met with him, asked for his credentials, which then Ratch handed on a data pad. John continued to walk and then was stopped by two Salarians with Assault Rifles. The captain walked over and took a small stick and pointed it at John's neck and asked, "What are you?"

"Spartan."

"I'm sorry, I don't comprehend."

"I'm a warrior. A human warrior. And this is state of the art armor. I'm not from around here as you can tell. And I need someone who could possibly repair my shields."

"You'd have to find a Military Scientist, I doubt they just give their skills to anybody. Ratch, who is this miscreant?"

"Claims to have come from (air quotes) Another dimension, (end air quotes), although I think he just did a lot of Hallex."

"Right, and you're letting him come on my ship?"

"Don't worry Tegi, he's controllable. Beat one of Wrex's lieutenants in hand to hand combat, so therefore he got Wrex's blessing for now."

"Very well, he can stay on my ship. That armor is intriguing, who manufactured it?"

"Um, ONI?"

"Nevermind."

After they scanned John in, Ratch led John up to the second floor and met with a Batarian named Lombak. Lombak was standing around a table where aliens were playing cards. It looks like in this universe, people play poker too. He saw that all the aliens were engrossed in the game.

The Batarian said, "Looking well Ratch."

"Soft Trader's diet can do that, all of Urdnot shuns me, but hey, survival of the fittest right? I'm fit to trade. So anyways I got a potential Shadow Broker agent, though he has a slight problem."

"Ah, this armored grunt in front of me. That's some mighty fancy armor."

John slouched back and said exasperatedly, "Yes, people seem keen on pointing that out."

"They will continue to," continued the Batarian, "If you continue making a name for yourself. Anyways, what do you need?"

"Don't got any credits," said John, "I need a way to establish an identity."

"Need a new life I see."

"Don't have one."

Lombak looked puzzled for a second, then said, "Well, as long as you are willing to do what we say when we get to the Citadel, you can trade work for security. I can set everything up. But you are going to have to kill some people? Are you ready for that job?"

John thought about it for a second then said, "Depends on who. I'm not going to kill innocents."

"Relax, nobody you kill will be innocent. We leave that to our assassins. No, you can get some easy jobs killing some thugs who owe us money."

"Okay, I can do it."

"Very well, I," the Batarian was cut off by a shrill alarm sounding out throughout the ship. All the Salarisians and Batarians looked up from their game of poker and stood up. One green colored Salarian yelled up, "That's three signals! It's a raid. Get to the armory!"

"What's going on?" asked John.

"Raid apparently," said Ratch, who then turned to Lombak and said, "Who would raid this ship?"

"The hell if I know, better go talk to the Captain, I got a lot invested, well more like the Shadow Broker has a lot riding on this

ship."

The Captain was on the bridge shouting orders to the other Salarians who were running about frantically. Something shook the ship, wobbling everybody over to the side. Ratch yelled out, "What the hell's going on?"

"Cerberus!" yelled the Captain.

"Cerberus? Why would Cerberus be attacking a Salarian ship?"

The Captain didn't answer the question and instead said, "get yourselves down to the armory, they are going to board."

"How does he know that?" commented Cortana.

The Batarian Lombok gesticulating wildly, said, "How do you know they are going to board? What do you have on this ship?"

"Alliance Cargo. No time to explain. Do you want to live or not? Last time I checked, Cerberus wasn't very merciful towards aliens."

"Alright, I'll get to it, come on Ratch, and Ratch's human pet."

They went down to the armory, and as they ran, John asked Lombok, "Who is Cerberus."

"Terrorists. They pretty much operate unchecked at this point, because of the war."

"War?"

"I'll tell you all you want to know later, seeing as you obviously have been hiding under some big ass rock, but now is not the time!"

"Got it, give me a weapon, and I'll kill our enemies."

"Confidence. Good, I'm pretty sure Cerberus won't spare you either, not when they see your armor."

John was handed an assault rifle. He took a look at the design. It was curved, in a way it reminded him a little of the MA5B, but it had a cut away in the middle and what appeared to be a small barrel at the top, and a larger barrel at the bottom. He wondered whether or not the bottom barrel was a grenade launcher. It had a scope on it with the words "Hard Lock" on it as well, and it was the color gray. Lombok handed him a few Thermal Clips, and he put them in his ammo pouches.

Then John and the other fighting crew moved a bunch of cover behind the airlock, where it was most likely that the Cerberus soldiers would move in. John quickly got behind a large crate, and readied himself. He had not seen real combat in a while. Feeling the gun felt so natural to him, like breathing. Ratch had pulled out his shotgun and a bunch of Salarians were behind a barrier erected in the middle of the room.

The battlefield itself was an open room, with only one wall with a porticullis in it. It obviously was a mess room, having a bunch of tables for eating and a kitchen, and thus the tables had been used to make the barrier. There were some utilities closets over on the left flank, and in the back were the barracks. The plan was if they couldn't hold Cerberus they would fall back to these barracks and fight them in close quarters. And thus they waited.

The ship continued to shake. Then, there was a lull in the bombardment. And then the door exploded coming in on the defenders and swiping the head of a Salarian fighter clean off. Sparks flew in the chaos and gunfire swooped in, taking down Lombak and a few other Salarians. A grenade, or at least what appeared to John flew in also, sending pieces of shrapnel and fragmentation into John, who then heard a crack in his visor.

Then he began to fire. Sweet pops of gunfire came out of his gun and he saw them impact armored soldiers that were coming out of the hole in the wall. He brought two down, tripping over each other as they started to bleed out. Ratch ran out into the battle and then was smacked in the face with a sword by a larger unit with strange antenna looking devices coming from its helmet. Before it could finish off Ratch, John let a burst of more fire into the things chest, watching as it appeared to have shields which absorbed the damage and crackled. The Unit took his sword and stabbed it through Ratch.

John got out of cover and fell back to the Barracks, where the three remaining survivors were setting up barriers. John said, "This is all that's left?"

"Yes, there's no escape, we either hold them off here or they'll slaughter us all."

Cortana piped in, "You should use the ventilation shafts to get to a lower level and escape."

John relayed the message to the Salarians who nodded and then began boosting each other up into the nearest one above them. John knew that he wouldn't fit inside the small opening, so he covered them, shooting down three Troopers who tried to approach the door. They got up and then they said, "How are we going to help you escape?"

"Don't worry, I'll handle these guys."

"Gonna be a hell of a fight without any shields, Chief." Said Cortana.

"Gotta find some way to keep it even."

"Even for you? Or for them?"

"Them," and then he ran at them, doing a barrel roll, and taking cover behind a table, and picking up a new assault rifle. He put it behind his head, and laid some fire, causing the troops to take cover themselves. He saw the elevator on the far right of the room. He needed to make a break for it, but his options were limited. Then he remembered that he could lift up tanks in his armor, and lifted the cover table up, using it as a shield.

The Cerberus troops were stunned for a second, then starting firing incessantly at John, moving slowly from his place in cover to the elevator. It was not too much effort for John to get there, and he pounded his fist on the elevator, hoping that it would go down for him. Nothing happened, and so he put the table down, this time sliding the arrow on the interface down. This time it worked, and the doors, opened. He picked up the table and started backing up into the elevator. A Cerberus soldier yelled, "Shit, he's getting away!"

The elevator doors closed.

Cortana said, "Well, that was close."

"It was fun, to be sure."

"Fun, well glad one of us is getting some enjoyment."

The elevator doors opened.

Nobody was in the docking bay as he expected, the Salarians would probably get there soon, but he needed to secure a way out. He saw Ratch's shuttle. It looked as if he would be returning to Tuchanka already. Then, just as he started running out, an explosion from the ceiling erupted and four large soldiers floated down on jetpacks coming from their shoes.

"You need one of those, Chief."

John barrel rolled again unto cover, and he heard one say, "Be careful with your shots, we don't know where it is!"

"They are looking for something Chief. We can use that to our advantage."

"Yeah, move from cover to cover."

John started up, quickly running behind a group of crates, as rounds whizzed by. He leaned out of cover and released some rounds at the head of a soldier, which then popped off. Chief was out of rounds, and popped in a new Thermal Clip. He moved on to another piece of cover, but then noticed that there was a red dot on his visor. He looked down, just as a sniper bullet shot right by. Now they had snipers.

"Shit." Said John.

He brought down another as he moved to yet another group of crates, but he was running out of room, and more were coming down. Then he heard a noise. The Salarians were almost there, and it was possible they could keep the sniper busy enough for him to take the Sniper out.

The Salarians dropped out from a vent and quickly got into cover. John yelled out, "SNIPER! Get down, try to lure his fire, I will see if I can get him."

A Salarian took down another trooper and replied, "Got it."

The Sniper tried to take a shot at a green Salarian but missed, shooting the ground. John started looking for a red laser, but it

looked as if the Sniper was getting wind of his trick. John decided to show off his visor again, in order to get a fix on the sniper. He did so, but no show, and instead a bullet hit him, causing a lot of pain.

John clenched his teeth and persevered, and then got up and shot the one responsible, who slumped down. The red laser appeared, all it took was a second and John found that the sniper was in the hole in the ceiling. John got back right down as a round whizzed by again. The Salarians had not taken any casualties, but were forced into a corner and would soon be over run.

John put in a new clip and started shooting wildly at the top, forcing the sniper to barrel roll back in order to escape the fire. John seized the opportunity and turned and shot at the troops attacking the Salarians, bringing down three of them in two bursts. Then one of the shielded ones came out of cover and fired an electrical charge from his omni-tool at John.

John shook in pain, and fell to the ground. The shock was definitely meant for taking down his shields, but John had none, and therefore was shocked. He tried to get up, but he was numb in the legs. He heard as the Salarians were finally gunned down. John continued to hobble, as Cortana yelled into his earpiece to keep moving. A Cerberus trooper came up behind him and said, "This guy didn't have shields."

John flipped over on his back and shot rounds into the trooper's face. He was starting to feel his legs, and was going to survive. Then there was a distant sound, and the fighting stopped.

"Run! Life support has been cut off, the Captain must have gotten to it to get us out of here, move!" yelled the shield unit.

They started running, and John realized what was going on, the oxygen was about to be cut off. His suit would be able to allow him to breathe in zero g for a little while but not forever.

The oxygen shut off, and the hangar became connected to space. The gravity started sucking things out, and then for some reason an explosion was heard below John, the ship was obviously going to self destruct.

John began to become pulled by the force of space.

He was pulled out immediately, with no chance to hold on to anything.

"John, I think we're in trouble."

"Figured that out yourself did you?"

John watched as the ship exploded, soundlessly in the vacuum of space. John floated away from it, and also away from Tuchanka.

John had never seen such a view. If he weren't going to be sucked out into the absolute nothing of space, he might have enjoyed it. He was laying out there, just doing nothing. He was finally relaxed, finally at peace. Was this the end? It could be, and the funny thing was that he didn't really care that he was no longer home, if he even had one.

An hour passed.

He said to Cortana, "Well. This is it I suppose."

Cortana laughed, "Don't count your chickens before they hatch, chief."

"What are you talking about?"

Cortana said, "Look, in a northern direction. It's a ship, coming to check out the wreckage."

"How do we get its attention?"

"Wave your arms or something"

Chief began to do so, and it seemed like a useless effort, but then the ship changed direction. It was headed in his direction. IT came very quickly.

"Cortana, it could run us over."

"Rather be quick than suffocation."

"Easy for you to say, here it comes."

The ship rounded about.

It appeared to be over him and then a blinding flash of light started to emanate, as doors opened. Two figures were approaching with a strange sort of machine. They were going to bring him in.

5. To Address Some Valid Concerns

To Address some Valid Concerns about Brothers In Steel,

Well, it has scarcely been less than two weeks, and my first fic has generated some attention from the community, for which I am very pleased. I have been appreciative of the feedback I have been getting, and thus I wish to write this small letter explaining the reasoning of some of the story choices that I have so far incorporated into my larger tale.

This section here is the section in which I thank those of which that have been kind to give constructive criticism on which the world of Mass Effect and Halo works, those of you instructing me in how the vacuum of space, and the proper rank of Master Chief, you are most appreciated, for I am not that kind of person who can search through all the wikis, and double check to keep things canon and realistic, my mind works to quickly for that, and for that I encourage to spot anything you find not right and alert me, so that when I go in to do rewrites, I can fix them up.

This section is devoted to explaining my reasoning as to why the Chief talks more than he should. Now as I said before, I am not completely knowledgeable in the halo canon, as I have only read two halo books, and my ignorance very well cripple the story for you my readers, but let me explain why I believe it is necessary for the Chief to talk. I think that if you think about, the Chief had a very

niche-specific role in the halo video games. He was a soldier, he didn't really exhibit any kind of tactical mind that I could see, that was more of Cortana's job. He did not have any sort of moral obligation over then what his duty was. He was a soldier, but he had never been given chance to think, for himself. Now if you apply this to the fact that he has pretty much been put into a new universe, with no identity no role, and the only skill available to him is combat, there is going to have be to some questions asked. He is going to have to talk in order to find his place in the galaxy, and find out how everything works, he is not going to automatically know what's going on. At the same time, the theme of my story is a introspective work, a way to make the Master Chief become like Shepard in a way.

Lastly, people have been saying that I have been too liberal with what Chief has been telling people, as that has been classified information. Well you are right. At the same time, it will still be necessary in parts of the story for this to be talked about, but I shall make it less open.

I appreciate the thought behind your comments, and will continue to write.

Keelah Selai.

~Gehenna

6. Interrogation

Chapter 5: Interrogation

The crew of the ship brought John in on some sort of table device and then floated into the ship bay, closing the doors behind it. The atmosphere returned, and then the crew took off their masks. One thick muscular man, with a clipped hair cut and very tanned skin said, in a rough voice, "What the hell is this Esteban?"

John decided to remain still and silent, hopefully he could learn who they were, he didn't see them as being the Cerberus troops that attacked the ship, but he decided to play it safe nether the less. The group of men surrounding him was fixed in awe, and one even put a hand on the armor. The one presumably named Esteban, "I don't know, this was the only thing left from the Salarian freighter that Cerberus attacked. It looks like a prototype form of armor. Kind of reminds me of the armor the pilots wear, but with a billed cap. I wonder what kind of shielding capabilities it has. Could be an advantage, but who made it I wonder?"

"Can't tell, no mark of manufacturer is on this thing. Is there a person in there you think? Or is this just a shell?"

"What do you think genius, its wearing a helmet, I'm going to try and take it off."

John gripped the man's hand and said, "Boo."

The man, who was balding and had a worn down complexion was shocked and stepped back, and John got up. The muscular man pulled out a pistol and held it up to John who put up his hands.

John said, "Relax, I don't want any trouble. I just prefer my helmet on is all."

"Who are you?" asked the gunman, "And where you get that army?"

"Don't think telling you is going to make any difference. I am not something you can easily comprehend."

"Oh yeah, I've seen a lot of crazy shit, you can tell me anything."

"Well, if you insist."

John took a seat back on the table and said, "I am Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan 117. I hail from the former planet of Reach. I am a soldier in the United Nations Space Corps. And this armor is MJOLNIR MARK VI Armor. I got it from the UNSC. They made it somewhere. Reach I think."

Nobody said a word. Then the muscular man said, "I think you should talk to our commanding officer about that, maybe he can ...Reinstate you."

"Listen, I know you think I'm Section 8."

The balding man known as Esteban said, "Well, I think that's pretty clear."

"But I can prove it."

"How?"

"Well, I think I can, I just need a way," John pulled out Cortana's chip, "to plug this into an interface of some sort. Does this ship have an AI interface system?"

A crystal clear, synthesized voice came out of nowhere and said, "I am the Ship's Artificial Intelligence. If I may, I can examine the chip, I will be down there in a moment."

"Wait," said John, "How will she be able to come down here."

"You'll see." Said muscle man.

"Okay."

After a wait of a minute, out of the elevator came a chrome covered female body, with an orange visor. When it spoke, it spoke in the same voice as the AI, so apparently in this universe, though John, AI can take up physical bodies. He wondered if that might be the key to freeing Cortana from his armor. He decided that he should try and make an allegiance with the AI.

It said, "Let me take a look at that chip."

John handed the Chief, and watched at the AI robot scanned it with a beam from its eyes. Then said, "The technology is not too different than previous model Computer Storage chips, circa the year 2091, if I

can build an adapter I can communicate with whatever is on this chip. What is on it?"

"Information," said John, deciding that telling them he had an AI was a little risky for Cortana. The AI took it and said, "I will begin construction of an adapter immediately, until then, I believe the Crew can keep you under surveillance in Life Support, for it is unoccupied."

"Ok."

Muscle man then said, "Alright, everybody can get back to work, Westmoreland, come with me and we'll escort our new friend upstairs."

John was escorted upstairs in hand cuffs. He knew he could break them apart, but his options were limited, and he didn't know what kind of defenses they could muster. He didn't even know if they were from the same group that attacked the cargo ship. He decided that silence was his best weapon. He ducked his head down as they entered life support, a small room with one rectangular window looking out at the engine core. It was a sight to see, a giant blue ball with sparks of energy flickering on and off. There were some glass cases on the wall, and the only piece of furniture in the room was a small desk looking at the illuminated wall in front of it.

John took a seat on it.

Muscle man said, "Alright, we'll keep you here until our commander knows what to do with you."

"Right."

"Need anything?"

John heard that and then realized that nobody had ever asked him that question. He had never been held prisoner before either. John said, "Nothing."

"Alright." And muscle man left.

John waited about two hours, alone with his thoughts. He wondered what was happening to Cortana. He wondered if he had made the right choice in just handing her over, but what options did he have? John decided to just let things play out, he wasn't going anywhere, and in reality, they could take her away from him at anytime anyway. Better she have the chance to give them some answers.

The door opened and Muscle man and another man walked in. The man was of average height and build, he had a slight crop of hair on his head and his face. He had a sort of look that showed great discipline, but his eyes revealed some sort of mystery behind him. He was wearing a simple casual uniform, a blue t-shirt and military cargo shorts. He stood next to John and then by the markings on his shirt, he could tell that the man was an officer. John stood up and saluted.

The man said, "At ease."

John eased up.

"You are military then?"

"Yes sir."

"Do you know who I am?"

"No sir."

The man looked at Muscle man.

"Okay, where are you from, and why were you on that Salarian ship."

John knew this could decide whether or not they keep him as a prisoner. He had no thought to harm them, in fact, he wondered if they could get him in the military some how, get him back to fighting, but he would need to find a way to explain without sounding crazy, that he may have possibly been transported to another dimension.

"Ok." Said John, "I am not from this universe."

"What?" said the man.

Muscles said, "Yeah he spoke some sort of babble when we asked the same question."

"Another universe? The only reason I will even listen to this is well, I've heard things crazy before, though not as crazy as this for sure."

"Right, well, I'm a Spartan, one of the best fighting units in the United Nation Space Corps, which is the united Government of Earth and Her Colonies."

"Earth? What are you talking about, Earth is run by the Human Systems Alliance."

"Um yeah, well where I come from that's what its called. And I fought for over 27 years..against the enemies of Earth. An alien race known as the Covenant, and another one known as the Flood. And after I got done fighting them, well, I was stranded on a derelict ship. And somehow I got transported here, through what was a Slip space ruptureâ€¦um, a worm holeâ€¦"

The commander looked stunned. Then he said, "So you claim to be from another universe? A Universe where Earth where has colonies but they are under attack by Aliens and..Flooding?"

"Yes, though the Flood are also aliens. And the war should be over. If not, well then I got stranded for nothing, but I will probably never know."

The commander put his hand up to his chin and thought, "There's only one way to find out."

"Commander," said Muscles.

"James, stay here, and watch him with Westmoreland. I need to get Dr. T'soni."

A doctor, thought John, they are probably going to do tests on me.

"Sure thing, loco."

The Commander left, and John asked the Muscle man now known as James, "So is the doctor going to check me out?"

"I'm sure of it. Though Asari get all metaphysical. I still think you are crazy, but you seem to be in control of yourself. Which is more I can say for every indoctrinated son of a bitch that I've come across."

John didn't know what he was talking about and just kept quiet.

7. War

Chapter Six: War

John waited for about a half an hour, when the Commander returned. Coming along with him was a kind of alien that John had never seen anything like. Until then, all alien forms of life that John had killed, spoken with or fought with was some ugly brute in some way or the other. The Elites were known as squid lips, due to the fact that their mouths were split into four different parts. There were also the Brutes; they were just big giant monkeys. And the Krogan and Salarians and Batarians were far from pretty, especially not the Batarians with four eyes, and a sneering demeanor, and over all, the look as if their rear ends had been switched with the front.

But the alien that walked with the commander was a blue woman being, with a sculpted fold of skin, forming a kind of flower on the back of the head. She wore a white jumpsuit with a cape, and she walked in with cold confidence. She said to the Commander, but looking at John, "So this is the pick up?"

"Yes, he has some interesting claims, and I need you to read through his mind like you did to me after Therum."

"You want me to ascertain the truth?"

"I believe he believes it, I just need to know if he's seen what he's seen. He's claiming some things that are a little far fetched, even by our standards."

"I'm willing to cooperate," said John. "And like I said before, the chip in my helmet has information on it."

"May not need it," said the commander.

"My name is Liara T'soni," said the blue alien woman, "And I am a doctor of a sort. I need you to tell me what you told the Commander."

"Right, well, I know this is hard to believe but I come from another universe. I'm a Spartan, one of the major front line special forces of the United Nations Space Command, which as the best I can figure, is like the Human Systems Alliance that I heard about while on

Tuchanka, the planet with all those Krogan."

"Wait, how did you get on Tuchanka? You failed to mention that before." Said The Commander.

"Yeah that's where my ship came out of the worm hole."

"Worm hole?" said Liara.

"Yeah, that's the only thing that I can think of , of how I got here."

"So there's a wreckage of a ship on Tuchanka that we can examine?"

"Yes, but the Urdnot were going to salvage it soon."

"Oh so you know Urdnot then?"

"Yeah, I beat one in a fight."

James scoffed then said under his breath, "Impossible."

"Not impossible, I'm a Spartan, I've fought a lot worse things than those Krogan, though not without armor."

"So we could find the wreckage," said Liara, "and it would prove his story if there was different technology."

Neither John nor the commander had considered that until then.

"Alright, so Liara can you um, do your "embrace eternity" thing?" said the commander.

"Yes, I can meld. What is your name again, Spartan?"

"John-117."

"What's the number for?"

"My Service number."

"Okay, can you take off your helmet?"

John twisted it off and Liara put his hands on the sides of his face, then massaged his temples. Her hands felt warm, and were pleasant, then, he heard her say, "Embrace eternity" and then a flash of images came to John's mind.

Pictures of the Covenant on Reach, pictures of fighting the flood on Earth, pictures of his fellow Spartans being shot down by Covenant ground troops. Pictures of him holding Spartan Johnson before he died, after being blasted with a beam by Guilty Spark. So much memories flooded his mind, and then he saw a picture of him being stolen by the Military, bringing him to Reach, and being forced to participate in grueling physical training. Then they stopped and he returned to reality.

Liara took a step back and wobbled, then said, "That was intense, almost as intense as what I experienced with you, Shepard," she said that while looking at the commander, thus revealing his name.

"Well then is he what he says he is?"

"Lets not talk about John as if he is not here." Said Liara.

John stood up and spoke for himself, "So you saw it right? Everything that I said is true?"

"Yes. We don't need any more proof than what I saw. But now Shepard, I must leave you to decide on what his fate is."

Liara left the room. James said, "Will she be okay?"

"Yes, the joining is tiring for her." Said Shepard.

Shepard stood there not moving and thought for a second, "So, John-117, there's no way you will be returning to your universe. What was your plan?"

"I don't know, the ship I was on was going to take me to the Citadel."

"I see."

"But in all honesty, I want to fight. That's been my whole life, my career is warfare."

"No lack of that soldier, but I'd have to get permission from the Brass whether or not that's a viable option. But let me fill you in on the enemy we are facing."

Shepard leaned up against the wall and said, "We are at war this is true, and we could use someone like you. We are at war with an enemy that is nearly invulnerable. An enemy that does not show pity nor mercy. An enemy that will not rest until all organic life in the galaxy is harvested by them. We fight the Reapers, and advanced form of synthetic organisms. They sort of look like giant squid in a way."

John didn't have a hard time believing this, seeing as he had spent the last few months in his universe fighting a bio-weapon that would consume all life in the galaxy if given the chance and had activated a weapon that could destroy galaxies. Anything was believable to him. He said, "Well, I have had my share of adventures and crazy stories, yours seems normal to me."

Shepard smiled and said, "You're one of the few, most people thought I was crazy, until the problem came up and bit them on the asses. Anyways, you say you are a soldier? One of the best?"

"Yes sir."

"What sort of training have you had?"

"full military training, hand to hand combat, marksmanship, physical training, and endurance training. I have been biologically engineered for combat, and am much stronger than the average human. I can also

lift up tons of weight , literal tons I mean, when my armor is on."

"Impressive, well I will relay a report to my superiors. It is possible they may allow you to become part of my crew. Do you want that?"

"I don't see any better offers now. I'll need some new armaments to be sure.."

"Yeah, I noticed your armor, it doesn't have any shields correct?"

"It did, but they were disabled after I went through the worm-hole"

"We can get you new armor, if you are allowed into the military."

"Sir, I should let you know that my armor is designed to interface with the chip I have EDI, I.." He knew that they would find out about Cortana eventually so he decided it would be best not to hide truths, "have an AI on it that helps me in combat. It is still functional, thankfully, and I'd like to find out whether or not I could keep it still."

"AI, are technically illegal, though we have one. I don't know if I could guarantee its return to you, but I know for a fact we can't have you operating with deficient armor. We'll see how useful this AI is to us before we decide anything."

John pursed his lips and said nothing. He wasn't going to just let them take Cortana for their own experiments. But at that moment he couldn't do anything about it. "Shall I stay here, sir?"

"Yes, I will let you know what my superiors say. I can have food brought to you if you want."

"Sure, that will be good, thanks."

Shepard left, leaving John to wait for what would happen next.

8. Oath

Chapter 7: Promise

The next few hours were tedious for John, as he had nothing to occupy himself but his thoughts on Cortana. He shuffled around the room several times. A crewman came in with a plate of food. It was very similar to the standard military rations that Chief had gotten every now and then in the UNSC, obviously the war wasn't going bad enough that they couldn't eat every now and then; back on the Halo ring he went days going off only on adrenaline and energy pills.

After a while, Shepard walked into the room and said, "I would like you to come with me."

It was not a request, more of a command, possibly a good sign of being allowed to be on the ship.

John followed behind and they took an elevator up a floor. They exited into a room that was a wide corridor that narrowed down into the cockpit of the ship. John noticed that the front window was very vulnerable to fire, similar to the UNSC ships. He only noticed how inefficient it was, and that the ships of the Covenant were obviously better protected. There was a big circular map of light in the middle of the room, and it resembled the Milk Way Galaxy. That obviously was the navigational system.

Shepard led him onto into another room, where there was some sort of scanning device. Shepard walked through, and after two seconds, the blue light scanner let him pass. Chief walked into it, and it started to beep. Shepard said to the attendants, "He's not in the registry yet, let it slip this one time."

They agreed and Shepard and John walked into yet another room, a circular room with a similar holographic projection like the one in the first room. It showed a picture of a strange blue print, and around the room were various terminals. They walked into an outlet of the room with a blue sided wall and then Shepard said, "Stand still John, we're about to be scanned and put on Vid-call."

John got into a military posture and stood at attention. Then out of a wall of blue light, came an elderly man in blue naval uniform. He looked very similar to Lord Hood, but with an air of ruggedness that Hood would never had. He looked like a leader, and when he spoke, he spoke with a blunt air of command that reminded John of his own fellow Spartans.

Shepard saluted, and thus John did the same.

"Commander is this the war asset that you told me about?"

"Yes, sir."

The man looked John up and down. John was not wearing his helmet at the moment, but he kept his visage completely emotionless. Then the man said, "So, impressive armor you got there. The Commander told me some things, things that you said of course, that coming from any other person I would have thought was crazy nonsense. However, the Commander is one person I know will always be truthful. So I'm willing to let you answer these two questions, who are you? And why do you want to fight for us?"

John readied himself, cleared his throat, and told the truth, he wasn't going to back out now. "Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 of the SPARTAN-II program, a program designed to bring about the best frontline offensive units, in the goal of defending Earth and her colonies. I want to fight for you, for I want to fight for Earth. And with due respect, because I don't have any other options right now anyway."

The man scratched his beard then said, "So lets get this straight, you are from another universe, a universe, where Earth exists, and apparently, they created you to fight an alien threat?"

"Yes,sir." Replied John.

"And this armor of yours, what does it do?"

"It is an armor that has advanced combat shielding, increases strength, distributes bio-foam, which from my understanding, is similar to your medi-gel. It also can house a ship-board AI."

Commander Shepard interjected, "Which we have on a storage chip that came from the Master Chief's helmet. He was willing to give it up, as a gesture of good faith."

"So you really do want to fight for us?" said the man.

"Yes, sir. If I may be frank, fighting is what I do best."

"Confidence. We need a lot more of it, and if you can do what you can, Commander, I allow for his recruitment however, the rank of Master Chief does not exist here, so we shall just give you the rank of Operations Chief. Your responsibilities will be whatever the Commander gives to you. You will need to be outfitted of course, but I would like to have our scientists take a look at your armor. Of course, now that you are one of us, the choice is beyond you, but we will return it to you once we have scanned the tech."

"Of course, Sir."

"Welcome to the Corps. Hopefully, I'm not wasting resources on some lunatic. Hackett out."

The man left. John said, "Well that was easier than I thought it would be."

"Desperate times. Report down to the armory tomorrow at 0600 hours. We'll get you outfitted."

"Sir, I must inform you that my armor is very advanced. Once they scan it I'd like it returned if possible."

"I have the feeling that you've gotten an attachment to your armor."

"In a way. I will still be able to serve, but even the Krogan admitted it was more advanced than their own."

"Noted. Dismissed, Chief. I trust you can return to the Life Support Deck."

The Commander left and John walked back to Life Support. He took his armor off, and then he took a seat. So he was now part of the Alliance military. He now had a place in the galaxy, and a way for him to get assimilated. John rested on his bunk for a little while, and then there was a knock on the door. John got up and opened it. There was the ship's AI who had taken a robot body. It said to John, "I am here to tell you that my adapter worked and I was able to have a civil conversation with the AI known as Cortana."

"So there's no doubt now that what I say is true?"

"It was confirmed by Dr. T'soni. Therefore I believe there is enough source to extend trust to you. Welcome to

Normandy."

"Normandy?"

"That is the name of this ship."

"Okay, well, can I keep Cortana's chip. They are taking my armor for study, but they will return it."

"Actually you might find it interesting that I can use a VI interface to allow.." she paused for a second, "Her, as she considers herself a she, to speak to you through the adapter. It is in the AI core. Of course, you would have to be supervised, but I think that I can allow it."

"Thank you, where is the AI Core?"

"On this level, follow me."

John was taken to a room behind the medical bay. It was a small room, with different types of glowing server boxes on each side. There was a small table at the end, and the AI robot pointed to a terminal by it. John pressed a button, and Cortana appeared in a miniature form.

"John! What's been going on? I've been caught in the dark!"

"I'll explain. How have you been?"

"It's been hell. Not knowing anything but the data on this chip. What have you been doing? Why would you just hand me over? Where are we even?"

"We are on the SSV Normandy, it's a Human Alliance ship. I would have preferred as well not to separate us, but however, I didn't see any other choice. Besides, I think I found us a way to do some good, fit in so to speak."

"How?"

"I've become a member of their military."

"Really now? Where'd they take your suit?"

"They want to study it for a while, and they'll return it back to me. Seeing as they are at war, they could probably use the advantages it has."

"You just let them take it?"

"Cortana, I've never known you to act so irrationally. There is no way we can return to our world. And there's no way we're endangering anybody back home. We have to accept the fact that we are no longer who we are anymore. I think..I think you are becoming Rampant."

"What? I'm not becoming Rampant, it's you that's thinking illogically."

"Cortana, if this AI wasn't here, I could say a lot more, but the

short story is that I'm worried about your wellbeing, you've been trapped in the suit and on the Forward Unto Dawn for a long time. I want you to understand that I made the right choice."

"But we don't even know if we can trust these people? And that thing over there," she pointed at the AI robot, "Probed my information banks. It was..not pleasant."

"Really?" John said to EDI.

The AI replied, "I had to, to verify the truth. I apologize if it caused any duress. It was quite curious that an artificial intelligence would feel pain. I think I will take my leave now. You may continue talking until you are ready."

EDI left.

John stood there for a minute, then said, "Listen, you'll be back with me soon."

"I hope so. I don't like the idea of being these humans' plaything."

"They saved us, and they have treated me well. I think I will give them a little trust for now. Don't worry, I can handle this. When have I ever let you down before?"

"Never."

9. Adjustment

Chapter 8: Adjustment

John took a good rest in his room in Life support. He got up, and the bed rolled itself away into the wall. After doing some stretches, he made his way down to the Armory level, in order to get outfitted. The idea of wearing armor that wasn't the MJOLNIR, seemed a little repulsive; but it would be returned soon, and he was curious as to how the people of this universe defended themselves. When he got down to the armory a crew member motioned him over to a table, and handed him a hot cup of coffee. Not sure what to do, John just quickly sipped it all at once. The crew man, an older looking African American with a small clipped beard looked surprised and then said, "The name's Rogers, once Cortez gets here, we can brief you on your new armor, and the standard Alliance issue ordinance that you will be receiving."

The bald man from John's first entry into the Normandy came around and he shook John's hand, in a firm manner. He said, "Well, you're the new recruit aren't you. Glad to have you aboard. I've heard that you have had special training. So obviously you know how to fight. Have you used any mass accelerator weapons before?"

"Yes, I fought some of the Cerberus troops on the ship before you picked me up."

"Excellent, do you know what model and type of gun you were using?"

"It was an Assault Rifle, and it consisted of two barrels separated by an empty space. It held 30 rounds."

"Ah, the M-8, well that was probably what we were going to give you, unless you had a thing for sniper rifles."

"Actually I've always sort of had a knack for shotguns."

"Shotguns eh?" said Rogers, "I think the commander got some Scimitars from the field in the back, if you want I can see if I can re acquisition them for you, if you want to give it a try."

"I'm up for anything," said John.

"Cortez, show him the armor while I bring out the guns."

"Right, follow me." Cortez said, and motioned John over to a table. There was a set of armor, all the color of fine steel, a chestplate, armored gauntlets, a set of greaves, and a helmet. The shoulder had an insignia on it; it said N7 in bright red letters. The helmet wasn't John's style personally; it was too angular and had no visible slits for eyes. Although that probably wasn't how one viewed from inside, he didn't like it. The visor of the MJOLRNIR Mark VI was what he was used to, but he didn't complain. He merely touched the pieces one by one and said, "You want me to try these on?"

Steve nodded and John put them on, hearing them click into place. It felt good and was surprisingly light, very light compared to the MJOLRNIR armor. He put the helmet on, and saw the world through a strange red light. However the audio quality was supreme; he could hear every little noise inside the armory. He wondered if this was used for stealth operations; be able to hear where the enemy was. John asked, "I like the Helmet, seems very practical."

"Yeah," said Rogers, "It's the Death Mask. Intimidating as shit, but also practical. Okay you can take it off now, we're going to run you in through your weapons briefing."

John took the armor off and placed it back on the rack. Then he walked over to the bench, where Cortez presented John with a red M-8 Avenger, and next to it, what appeared to be a white box, but in reality was a compact shotgun.

John picked up the assault rifle and took a quick look into its optics. He nodded approvingly, the optics were clean. Then he picked up the shotgun. It was a little lighter than the shotgun the Krogans had let him borrow for cleaning out the Pyjak infestation, but not by too much. It felt good in John's hands. John said, "Okay, I think these will do."

"Yeah, though you might want a pistol. A pistol is a good weapon if you are running low on thermal clips for the others and for dealing with light armored foes. Here," Cortez handed John a small compact pistol, that had a black barrel and a white grip, "Take this Predator. There's no shooting range on the Normandy but I entrust you know your way around pistols."

"Of course, does it have a scope?"

"Scope?" questioned Rogers.

"Yes, I prefer my pistols with scopes."

"Nah, no scopes right now, but you can send out a reacquisition order if you want."

"Okay," said John.

After that John was given a quick tour of the ship. The Ship had five levels, though John needed only to really be on the 3rd and 5th floors. The 1st floor was the Captain's Quarters, which were not off limits, but nobody really had any business unless it was with the Captain. The 2nd floor was the combat information center and the war room, where various war related activities were done, and where the ship's navigational systems were operated. The third floor, where the Life Support room was, was the crew deck, and Cortez showed John around. There was a mess room, where the crew was served meals between missions, an engine room, and the medical bay, where John was slated to get a physical exam from the ship's doctor, Dr. Michel. The fourth floor was the engineering level, and the fifth floor was the armory and shuttle bay.

John went to the medical bay, an empty room where an average height woman with auburn hair sat at a desk and was taking readings. John coughed and said, "I was sent to see the Doctor."

"Ah yes, you must be the new crew man, John." She said this in a french accent. "I am Dr. Michel. I will be using my omni-tool to scan your vitals, and then I will just take a quick blood sample and you can be on your way."

John stood still as she waved her omni-tool over his front twice and then moved around to the back. She did some numbers then said, "You have a very hardy constitution, Operations Chief, and your vitals are in prime condition. You are very healthy. You are definitely fit to be a soldier. I take it you have dealt with combat stress before?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Good. Now let me just take a blood sample," She took a small device and poked John with it, extracting a little bit of blood. "Very good, now you may be on your way."

"Thank you, Ma'am."

The next few days were easy on John, most of the time he did Physical training regimen in the had never had so many days off duty before. On the first day he was formally introduced to James Vega. They shook hands and James said, "James Vega, Lieutenant, welcome to the Normandy Operations Chief. Well as you can see we run a tight ship. You know of our current mission right?"

"Defeat the Reapers."

"Well that's the short story. In reality the Commander has the tough job of securing alliances between the races. Our last mission put us on Palaven which is the Turian homeworld. I don't know if you have run into Garrus yet, but he's one of them. I actually probably trust you more than I do the Turians, seeing as you don't have feathers

growing out of your head."

John replied, confused, "Are Aliens not trusted by humans?"

"Course not, but we need their help if we are going to win this. They feel the same way about us, but they know we are dependable. Shepard saved their leadership three years ago, so we can count on them, once we solve their problems."

"Sounds like a bunch of hurdles. You think they would co-operate..then again.." John thought back to how the Insurrectionists continued to bomb UNSC colonies even during the war with the Covenant.

"They are all self-centered, but they do see reason, from time to time. It was really hard myself to leave Earth, watching it get burned to the ground."

John was surprised when he heard that Earth had been taken by these so called Reapers. "Earth has been taken?"

"Yeah, now I remember that you don't know anything that's going on. Are you seriously from another universe with humans? That's pretty loco if you ask me."

"Yeah I'm not lying, back where I came from Earth was at war itself, and going to battle with aliens of its own."

"Not saying you are lying, just thinking you might believe something that's not true. But doesn't matter to me, I just want to see what you can do. Anyways you are probably here to work out right?"

"Yeah, got to keep In good condition."

"Okay, well there's a bench press there," James pointed over to one by the wall, "and there's also a bar for pull ups right here, there's also some weights on the wall."

"Got it, thanks." Said John. John worked out for about an hour in the morning and an hour at night for three days. It was good to get into a routine. During the days he mostly spent his time in the armory, either working out or learning about the weapons that he would be using, modding them and learning how to set them up. He often talked with Cortez and James, and they gave him some information on how the war had been going so far. It didn't sound so good, but John had taken on challenges before, and wasn't concerned as long as the leadership remained constant. He had yet to see first hand the destruction the Reapers could cause.

One day as he was heading upstairs on the elevator, the elevator opened up and inside was the Blue skin colored alien known as Liara who had touched his mind. John walked into the elevator and she gave him a smile. John smiled back, which felt weird. He hadn't smiled in a while, not sense the time he lit the bomb in the Covenant Carrier over Earth, in what seemed like an eternity.

Liara said, "I don't think we've been formally introduced, my name is Dr. Liara T'soni."

She gave out her hand and John gave his hand. Her hand felt very

smooth. He said, "John 117, at your service, ma'am."

"Nice to meet you John. I didn't really explain how I ascertained the truth about yourâ€|past did I?"

"No, but there are some things I just have to accept."

"That's very interesting. Not many people take things on face value. But anyways, I saw everything you have went through."

"Really?"

"Yes, and I'm interested in finding out more about your world. Would you care to come to my office some time and tell me?"

"As long as I don't have any duties, then yes I would."

"Excellent, come by, we are on the same level," the door opened, "Its over on the port side of the Engine core."

"Sure." They departed and she said, "Good bye for now, John."

John watched her walk off. It was going to be strange, making friends. But he didn't have a reason not to, and something about the Doctor was very interesting. John shrugged and went back to rest a little more.

Later that day, there was a voice on the intercom. John was reading his data pad, reading up on some history. Strangely all history prior to 2012 was the exact same as his own Earth. The similarities were many, he found it very weird. The voice was a female's, with a clear British accent. It said, "Calling John 117 to the Briefing room."

John quickly got up and took the elevator to the war room. The scanning team still hadn't gotten information on who he was yet, and he had a little trouble getting through. However a very tanned woman with wavy black hair in casual gear, walked in and said, "John 117 is clear to get through until told otherwise by the Commander." They let him through.

"Thanks," said John.

"No problem, this way, into the war room, to meet the Commander."

John walked into the war room and saw Shepard and a strange alien standing over a terminal. The alien had a strange face that seemed to be similar to that of a cat, and it wore heavy blue armor, made of individual plates. The alien had elaborate blue colored feathers on the top of its head and a holographic visor over its eyes.

Shepard said, "Good , you are here Chief. Garrus, this is our new recruit, John-117."

John shook the alien's hand who said, "Garrus Vakarian. I'm here to evaluate your combat skills. We're going to be running an op together."

The alien sounded confident, bordering on cocky. John could tell just by looking at him that this was a renegade.

"Sounds good, what's the mission?"

Shepard used his omni-tool to bring up a 3-D model of a planet and then zoomed in on a type of lab facility. It reminded John of the Sword Base on Reach. He remembered being there, doing sims with Jun-A266. He wondered where the man was, since he had never been officially declared M.I.A. John watched as Shepard pointed to the facility and said, "This is Sanctum. It's a small planet; there are no real colonies due to the high winds and cold temperatures. There is a Cerberus base where they are studying Reaper technology. You and Garrus will be going in to acquire the Reaper tech samples, or if failing that, in case you can't extract them manually, take any data."

"Yes, sir."

"Suit up and meet Garrus in the shuttle. You leave at 0200."

Finally! Some Combat, thought John.

Shepard said after John had left, "Alright, Garrus. Any suspicious behavior and you put him down, I don't trust him yet."

"Of course, Shepard."

10. Trial

Chapter 9: Trial

During the shuttle flight down to the planet, John received a new Omni-tool. All military personnel were given a top of the line model, and now due to the nature of the Reaper forces, they were all modified with technology that created a blade for offensive melee capabilities. John activated his omni-blade and looked at it with approval. Like the energy sword the Elites used, it had a strange, ethereal quality around it. John was very fond of finishing his enemies up close. He sheathed it back and continued to fiddle around with his omni-tool.

From the ship, the A.I, (Who John learned was called EDI), told him, "You have been given a new identity and registry information, and it is up to you what you want your name to be."

"Hmmmâ€¦" John thought for a second then said, "John Spartan."

"Very well, John Spartan."

It had a certain ring to it, though John had never possessed a flare for literary skills. The scope of his imagination was limited at most times.

"We are coming up over the planet," said Cortez from the cockpit of the Kodiak Shuttle.

John put on his helmet and secured it. Garrus nodded and said, "We

are going to be landing on a balcony on the west side of the perimeter. Follow procedure and this will be a quick mission."

"Yes,sir."

"You ready Chief?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alright, because I sure as hell am. Lets go have some fun."

Garrus pulled out a Mantis sniper rifle.

"You a marksman sir?" Inquired John.

"Yes, I fancy myself to be somewhat of sharpshooter."

"Nice," said John.

"Indeed," Garrus stroked the barrel of the gun, "alright here we go, wait for the green light."

Five seconds passed, and a green light lit up the shuttle. The door opened and Garrus jumped out onto the balcony. Chief followed his example and quickly scrambled to cover behind a large cooling vat. Garrus waited a minute, pressed a few buttons on his rifle, and got out of cover. He motioned for John to come out of cover and follow his lead. John brought out his shotgun and followed slowly as Garrus led them into a small corridor. There was a stairway to the front leading up, and one to the right leading down. Garrus whispered into his earpiece, "Cortez, where's the first artifact?"

"Upstairs, there's a squad of Cerberus troops in that room but you can sneak up on them by taking cover behind some of the crates and the desk on the right side of the room."

"Chief, take the right side, I'll take the left."

"Got it."

"Chief, does your omni-tool allow for use of shield overloads?"

"Not that I know of."

"Alright if you see a shield one, keep your distance, they have stun batons and are hard to take down. Lets move."

John followed Garrus' lead up the stairs. Like the pilot had said, there were crates on the right side of the room, both on each side of the stairway. Quietly, they were able to sneak behind cover without the Cerberus troops even noticing. There were three on the right side, and four on the left in a sort of data storage room. Garrus motioned to hold position for a moment and leaned out of cover to take aim with his sniper rifle.

John prepped his shotgun, caressing the handle and took a deep breath.

Garrus mouthed out the word, "Strike."

John got up and pulled the Cerberus trooper next to his cover down to the ground. He unsheathed his omni-blade and drove it into his enemy, who squirmed a bit before breathing his last.. Then John got right back and shot a shotgun blast into the next soldier who had just pulled out his weapon. The soldier was blasted and sent reeling back over the desk. The last one took out his own weapon and fired a round which hit John just before he got back into cover. The blue of his shields flared for a second, then John did a barrel roll. He didn't know how Garrus was doing, but no troops were coming up behind him so Garrus must have been putting them at bay.

John got up and took two shots from the soldier to the chest, bringing his shields down to half strength. The soldier obviously had to reload so instead of trying to do it quickly charged at John.

"Not very smart." Said John, blasting the Soldier in the chest with a shotgun blast and sending him reeling out the window. The second soldier was back up, obviously only his shields were down. John looked behind him. Garrus had been sniping out the Cerberus troops and had taken two of them down. The other two were hiding. Quickly John ran to the downed soldier he had taken out and shot him in the head with a quick blast.

"Orders sir?" Said John.

"I can hold them off, you use your omni-tool to break down whatever shielding that artifact has."

"Yes, sir." John did as he was told, using his omni-tool to bypass the shields. He had only been taught how to do that the other day; he was surprised how simple it was. In a minute the shield was down, and the artifact was no longer being suspended within the shield. It was some sort of small statuette, purple in color and peculiar in form. John said, "I got it."

"Good, bring it back to the shuttle, these guys won't be going anywhere," said Garrus.

John walked back the way they came onto the landing pad and secured the sample. Then he made his way, only this time, the hallway was filled with Cerberus goons. They turned around when they heard him and said, "There's one! Weapons free!"

John quickly rolled over to cover. There were three of them, one of them being a shielded one. John pulled out his assault rifle and let out a couple bursts, weakening its shields. Garrus appeared at the top of the hall and realized that they didn't know he was there. Garrus took a second to aim a shot, then got a perfect headshot on one of the grunts, sending pieces of meat flying everywhere.

John kept firing out of cover and got the unshielded one. He switched back to his shotgun and decided to charge the last one whose shields had been taken out. Ramming himself into the Centurion, the enemy was flung over the side of the wall and landed thirty or so feet down on the next level. The soldier groaned, coughed up some blood, and then died.

Garrus said, "Crude, but effective. Alright we got one more."

They went on down stairs and found the second one. No troops awaited them, so John went over to scan it with the omni-tool while Garrus stood at attention. However, Garrus did not realize that behind him was a closet. Out of the closet popped out a Cerberus trooper, with a stun baton aimed at hitting Garrus. John's reflexes quickly turned on and he shot the trooper down before he could hit Garrus. Garrus turned around to see the stunned trooper and hit him in the face with the butt of his rifle.

Garrus then planted a shot in the trooper's head.

He shook himself, "Thanks, owe you one there, John."

Garrus commed in the shuttle after they finished recovering the data and artifact, "Cortez we got the second package, we are ready for evac."

"Negative! I got Cerberus fighters on me, three, no wait, make that four, I'm going to try and shake them off, hold up at the evac site until I can get there."

Garrus said to John, "Looks like we're stuck here for a few minutes until Cortez can shake off the fighters."

"Can he do it?"

"I hope so, because it looks like some more guests are coming to the party."

Garrus pointed upstairs where some more Cerberus foot soldiers had appeared, firing bursts of fire at them. Garrus and John ran back to the landing bay where they took cover behind some of the crates and cooling units. For about ten minutes Garrus and John called out targets to each other. Garrus would take out any enemies he could at range, while John dealt with any that came up close with his shotgun. John could hear Garrus counting under his breath. He obviously thought it was a game.

A Cerberus Sniper took position on the left flank, on a glass railing. John called him out and Garrus did a barrel roll, sending a wave of electronic energy at the sniper's shield. The sniper backed up a bit and John threw a grenade, which then lit off a fuel tank.

This lit some of the foot soldiers and the sniper on fire.

"Come on Cortez, hurry up," muttered Garrus.

"Almost there, I lost two of them, I," he was cut off by static.

"That doesn't sound good!" yelled John firing assault rifle bursts at a fresh batch of Cerberus troops.

"Alright keep holding for three more minutes, if he doesn't show up by then, then we need to find a new plan."

They continued to hold for three more minutes. Cortez still didn't show up, and John was running low on ammo. John started to think of

ways to adapt to the situation.

"Sir!" he yelled, "There's a clearing beneath us, we need to try and jump to it."

"Alright, lets," Garrus was interpreted by the roar of the shuttle's engines. It pulled right next to the evac zon. "Lets get In the shuttle! Do you have the sample?"

"Yes!" shouted John, and jumped into the open door of the shuttle. Garrus jumped in after him and quickly got in. The door closed and Garrus gave it a quick pound with the back of his fist.

John took a seat down and so did Garrus.

For a few minutes all was silent, then Garrus said, "Good job Cortez."

"Thanks, sir."

"As for you, John 117, this was an official evaluation. Your skills are impressive. I can not wait until I can see you in your armor at full capacity. You have proven yourself."

"Thank you sir."

"Call me Garrus, sir always felt a little too formal for me. When we get back, lets hit the bar, I think you'll be an excellent addition to the team."

11. A Round of Drinks

**Wow, I can't believe this has gone to Ten chapters already. Its been such a blast writing this, and I hope more people will continue to read it and let me know what they think. I am also writing another fic called ME Revolutions that you guys should also check in and is partially why I don't update as often , along with the fact that finals are coming up. **

Peace,

Gehenna79

* * *

><p>Chapter 10: A few drinks.<p>

Once John returned to the Normandy, Garrus and he were taken to the War room for an official debriefing by Commander Shepard. The War room was full of analysts doing work on computers, and Commander Shepard was busy looking at the terminal interface and turned around to face John when he heard them coming from behind him. The Commander's eyes were surrounded by black rings; obviously the Commander wasn't getting enough sleep. John didn't have such problems being a Spartan; he was designed and trained to operate on little sleep. The last few days were interesting, having eight hours of sleep a night. But he wasn't complaining.

"So, Garrus," Shepard said, "How'd he do?"

"Excellent, sir," said Garrus, "He showed good combat ability, not to mention he saved me from a trooper trying to get the drop on me. He also was able to quickly adapt to the situation."

"Good, I'm starting to believe your story of being a super soldier. Not that I had any reason not to after Liara told me what she saw."

John said simply, "Yes, sir."

"You are dismissed, Chief."

John saluted and walked off. He went down to the AI Core to talk to Cortana. After getting a quick scan by one of the guards he went inside and turned on Cortana's console. She appeared this time not purple, but blue. She had her arms crossed and wore a surly look on her face. Obviously, she was displeased.

"Umâ€¦" began John.

"Having fun?" said Cortana with an attitude.

"In a way. Fighting enemies that are completely inept at doing their jobs isn't much of a challenge."

"Looking for more of a challenge are we? Wish I could tell you what's out there, but," she said dryly, "But, I am trapped in this network, with firewalls on all sides. So I can't really tell you much."

"When I get my armor back, you'll be able to be able to leave."

"And for what reason do you at all think they will give you back your armor? Just because you think you can prove some sort of deluded loyalty?"

"I don't know whether or not I'm loyal to them, Cortana, all I know is that I didn't have any options. I suppose I could have just started killing random people on the street take their money, but that would have not been the right thing. Besides, like I've said before, fighting is my best skill, they are giving me things to fight. It keeps me focused."

"Yeah, well, I know its not your fault Chief," she began, "But, I'm tired of this. Do you even know anything about what kind of enemy you are fighting."

John thought about it for a moment and said, "They are fighting some kind of advanced AI technology, is what James told me. James is a marine."

"Advanced AI?"

"Yeah, besides that I haven't had much time to learn. Don't really need a reason to either."

"As long as you get the job done.." started Cortana.

" It doesn't matter." Finished John.

Cortana and him talked for a little while longer about some of the things John had seen and then he decided to return to his room. After shutting Cortana off, he walked out the AI core, and ran into James. The marine said to John, "Hey Chief, heard your trial mission went well."

"Yeah."

"Congratulations, welcome to the Corps."

James held out his hand, and John firmly grasped it. "Mean grip you got there," remarked James, "Are you interested in getting a drink in the lounge? Drinks are tabbed on your pay check."

John thought about it for a moment and said, "Alright, I'll come along for a drink or two."

John followed James to the lounge, a small room on the port side of the ship. It consisted of a sweeping view of space, and one side was a bar, while one side was a poker table. At the poker table a couple of crew men were sitting around playing a game, and at the bar, Garrus was drinking a strange green drink. He turned around and said, "Operations Chief, Lieutenant."

"Come on Vakarian," James said humor fully, "Lose the formality."

"Well, Jimmy," said Garrus, "I don't technically outrank you, so I suppose I can let it slide, just this once. What will it be Chief, first round's on me."

John looked at the drinks, and since he didn't know any of them he asked, "What do you recommend James?"

"Two Asari Tumblers, bartender."

There was no bar tender so James quickly ran over and said, "Right away, Mr. Vega."

James poured a pink drink into John's glass. John lifted it up to his eyes and then said dryly, "It's pink."

"Yeah, and its good."

John had drank worse things than whatever was in the glass so he took a quick shot. It was a pleasant sensation, kind of a quick buzz, and had a sweet and slightly fruity flavor. John nodded appreciatively and said, "Thanks Garrus."

Garrus chuckled, "Any time Chief, glad you lost the sir, so the Commander tells me you are a special case, care to share your story?" Garrus took a casual lean on the bar table facing John. John thought about it for a second, and decided to say, "Sure, but you go first, sir."

"Oh I see, well, I suppose that's only fair, and my story cannot nearly be as interesting as yours."

James laughed, "Turian loves his stories."

Garrus began, "Well I am a Turian, from Palaven, and I used to be a cop on the Citadel."

"I know what the Citadel is, it's a big space station right?" asked John.

"Indeed, its where our government is stationed."

"Alright, continue," said John.

"I was fed up with all the bureaucratic crap on the Citadel. You see, its pretty hard to be a cop, because there's so much rules, and regulations, and I decided to leave and join our Commander, when he was on an investigation looking into the activities of Saren Arterius, a rogue Spectre."

"Spectre?" asked John.

"Shadow agents, big spooks." Said James.

The term made John immediately think of Veronica Dare, one of ONI's top field operatives.

"Yes," said Garrus, "They are considered above the law, allowed to do things there way, without anything in the way. Shepard is a Spectre as well as a Commander in the Human Systems Alliance. So anyways I joined up with Shepard, and we took Saren down. He had an army of Geth with him but we stopped him from trying to bring back the Reapers, who I'm sure you've heard something about."

"Yeah," replied John, "They are supposed to be giant living spaceships who have a problem with people."

"A little more than just a problem, I was with Shepard when we spoke to one, raiding one of Saren's bases. Their goal is to harvest all organic life, and possibly turn us into their slaves. But we defeated it. And one month later Shepard was killed in action by the Collectors, who were agents of the Reapers."

"Wait what?" said John, "The Commander Died?"

"Yes, but somehow Cerberus, the people we were fighting on our mission, brought him back. They are led by some rich 'humanitarian' (Garrus did some air quotes while saying that) and he funded the project that brought Shepard back to life."

"Wow, that's, sort of convenient." Said John.

"Indeed. Anyways, Shepard sought me out two years later and I joined him in his operation to shut down the Collectors."

"And then pow! Right in their cojones!" said James.

"Yes, as the Lieutenant said, we defeated them too. And for five months, Shepard was kept in prison for actions he did concerning a mass relay that he had to blow up to keep Reapers out of the galaxy.

"While that happened, I went back to my home world, and with some help formed a group of other soldiers helping my people get ready for

the war. Now the Reapers are here, and our all worlds are burning. If we don't do something soon, if we can't rally everybody together against this one threat," Garrus started to get loud, "We will all die!"

Everybody was silent and then Garrus said, "And that's why I'm glad somebody like you John, who doesn't seem to know anything about this, is deciding just to help us for the hell of it."

"Well, it wasn't a hard choice. I suppose my story will clear up that."

"Oh yes, you owe us a story."

John said, "Alright give me another drink." After taking a quick swig of another pink alcohol drink he started, "So, a long time ago, when I was just a kid, I was considered an eligible candidate for the Spartan II program, a program which turned humans into super soldiers. They taught me how to kill, how to survive and how to use the armor that I was given. At first, our job was to stop the Innies, the rebels who wanted to overthrow the Earth colonial government, but then we made contact with an alien race known as the Covenant, well, more accurately it was a collection of races who all worshipped the same gods, and for some reason they hated humanity and called us 'heretics'. So I've spent the last twenty years fighting them."

James and Garrus were listening intently, and after John stopped James asked, "So how'd you end up here?"

"Well, after I left in a ship from a major battle on the fringes of the galaxy, I floated about in space for a few years, then we ran into a slipspace rupture that must have transported me to this universe. According to the AI in my suit."

"AI?" asked Garrus.

"Yeah, the AI in the core? She came with me."

James coughed, "I went in there and EDI was talking to it, told me it was a VI interface prototype."

"Darn." Said John, realizing they were keeping Cortana a secret.

"So what were you doing before you came on our ship?" Garrus asked.

"I landed on this planet Tuchanka."

"The Krogan homeworld?"

"Yes."

"Okay, continue."

"They had me fight one of them, I defeated one and they gave me a ride to a freighter that was then attacked by the Cerberus people. I tried to save the crew but the Cerberus soldiers were merciless. Do you know why they attacked that frigate?"

"There was a Reaper artifact on that ship," said Garrus.

"Oh."

"Cerberus is using Reaper tech to augment their forces, its partially why we believe they have been indoctrinated."

"Indoctrinated?"

"Yeah," said James. "Its how they turn our own people against us, control their minds, make them go loco, turn into evil Dark Energy crackheads."

Garrus facepalmed.

"No," said Garrus, "The Reapers , even the dead ones, emit a field of energy that influences the thoughts and actions of those around it. That bends them to accept the Reapers logic and turns them into mindless thralls. Once completely indoctrinated there can be no saving them, only a bullet can do that."

John thought for a moment then said, "I faced an enemy similar to that. They were called the Flood. They consumed life and controlled their bodies. They would form to build large collective consciousnesses, and their goal was to conquer the galaxy. I think they were defeated. I think."

"Very interesting," was all Garrus said.

"Yeah," said John.

"Well, thanks for sharing your story, John."

James said, "Yeah good tale , your nickname is, I don't know what you shall be called yet, but I'll figure it out."

John looked at Garrus who just shook his head. John then said, "well, thanks for the drinks, I am going to go now." He shook Garrus and James hands and Garrus said, "Anytime."

John returned back to his room and found a data pad with a note on it.

John,

_I know that you are a little lost in our world. I thought you might want to learn more, so I commissioned you a lap top for extranet browsing. _

_Sincerely, _

Liara.

True to the letter's word, there was a laptop on his desk. John grinned and decided he would look at it after a few hours of sleep.

12. Companions and Offers

Chapter 11: Companions and Offers

When John woke up in the morning he used some of his new personal information to make an email account in the Alliance military's email service. Within an hour he already was getting spam from Morlan's shop and Hanar religious groups. He thought it would be a good idea to finally go visit Liara in her cabin across the way, not only because of a small amount of curiosity but just because he wanted to thank her properly for the computer.

Liara's room was on the same floor, so he knocked and the door opened. He looked around, and examining that was a small room with a set of giant screens on the right wall and several different computers and terminals, glowing with numbers and statistics, on the left wall. He said, "Dr. T'Soni?"

"GREETINGS!"

A little surprised, John turned around to see a glowing orb of light with a strange circular optic. John said, "Ah shit, it's a Monitor."

"I have no data on that term."

"You at least look like one, I already have a bad feeling about you."

"What is a 'monitor'?"

"Robots that look exactly like you and talk similar to you, and one of them tried to kill me a long time ago. You'll pardon me if I don't trust you right away."

"Hmmm..could you please elaborate on why it tried to kill you?"

"It's a long story, but it was over a disagreement."

"I am not capable of disagreeing, I am only programmed to assist Dr. T'Soni's work."

"Oh," said John now relieved that another small bulbous AI would not be trying to kill him, "alright, where is she?"

"Right here." Said Liara as she walked in, "What can I do for you John?"

"I just wanted to thank you properly for the laptop. I've been using it today."

"That's good. People in my line of work, are good at acquiring equipment."

"What's your line of work?" inquired John.

"Take a seat, and I'll tell you a little about myself," Liara gestured to a small couch behind her office area. "Would you like some tea?" she asked.

"Sure." John answered.

The tea was a little bitter but also had a subtle hit of sweetness. It tasted good. John had actually never had tea before but had heard it was popular back on Earth in his universe. Obviously some things were the same in this universe.

John relaxed into the couch and Liara sat opposite him and began, "Well, the reason why I could get you a laptop so easy was pretty simple, I just got you a acquisition order, however, it would have been easy even if I wasn't on the Normandy for I am an information broker."

John's interest was caught, "And that is?"

"Someone who buys and sells information. I took over for someone who was threatening a friend, and now his resources are mine, and I use them to help in the war effort."

"Interesting. So are your activities legal?"

"Not entirely, no. But I'm sure you can understand at least from what you know, that the stakes are high. And I've never done anything that ever hurt anybody. Not anybody innocent."

John considered nothing, and merely nodded. "Okay."

Liara sat for a minute, awkwardly sipping her tea and then finally saying, "So, I saw a great many things in your dreams."

"And I'm guessing you want an explanation on them? Or at least to ask me some questions about them?"

"If that's not too much to ask," said Liara, "Tell me about yourself, in a matter of seconds I saw your entire life, your entire history flash before my eyes. And I want to comprehend it, for some things wereâ€|troubling, to view from your perspective."

John raised an eyebrow, "Such as?"

"As to how you became a soldier? I saw the training process, or at least what I thought it was. It looked brutal."

"I wouldn't be sharing this with you if I thought I would be returning home. But seeing as that is not the case, I suppose nobody is going to care if I give up some secret information. I mean, you are anâ€|information broker, I'm sure you would just find it out anyways."

Liara grinned, "Definitely."

"When I was a child, I was taken by the military to become a Spartan. At the time we were being trained to fight against the Insurrectionists, those that wanted to destroy the union of the UNSC, um, it was like what you call here, the Human Systems Alliance. The training was brutal. Many days were spent doing harsh physical training, and there was no coddling, no mercy, from the scientists, from Sgt. Mendez my CO. In the end, it made me a weapon, and disciplined me into the soldier the galaxy needed me to be."

Liara nodded, taking interest in the story, "Why would your government allow children to be used as soldiers, more like lab rats, that soundsâ€|extreme?"

John thought to himself _I don't need any pity from you,_, "I don't think anyone ever knew. And when we were needed, nobody ever found out, nor did it even matter. We became heroes eventually, because of the Covenant."

"The Covenant?"

"Those were the aliens, you saw them right?"

"I saw a great many life forms that did not appear human."

"Well most of them were probably Covenant, they were aliens, aliens that wanted to kill us because of their religion. In the end, they could be killed and that was all that mattered."

"So, religious aliens wanted to kill the human race?"

"Yep, never really found out why."

"Interesting. So tell me about the others."

"What others?"

"The Tentacle monsters."

"Oh. That was the Flood."

"The Flood?"

"Yes. They were a parasitic life form, they attached themselves to a host, and then used the host to fight for them. It was veryâ€|gruesome."

"I see."

Neither of them talked for a moment. John sipped a little bit more of tea, and finally, Liara got up, smoothing out the folds of her skirt, and said, "Alright, John, well it was nice talking to you, but I will have to get back to work now."

"Wait, sorry," said John, "But you were going to tell me you said, how you read my mind."

"Oh," said Liara sheepishly, "Well, that's just a power my kind, the Asari have, we can meld our consciousnesses with other beings. We are very attached to the metaphysical."

"Right. Sounds useful. Well thanks for the tea, I'll let you work."

"Of course." John left and watched as Liara went back to work on her monitoring her screens. _That was awkward _thought John.

* * *

><p>For the rest of that day, John spent most of the day working out in the armory and then looking up more info on the extranet. He was given the duty of helping James tally up some of the ammunition supplies. It was long, tedious work, and after that he joined James again for more alcohol in the lounge. Some of the crewmen were talking about how there was going to be a conference of some races coming up on the Normandy. John heard that a Krogan clan chief was coming to join up, along with a Salarian Dalatrass. Apparently this was cause enough for everybody to start tightening up on security. Later that day, soldiers came in and went through some of John's stuff to his annoyance.<p>

One side effect of the tightened security also meant that any packages to be sent to the Normandy's crew were to be checked. Packages came in by being sent to the Normandy's assigned docking bay on the Citadel. After stopping by for a few hours for resupply, a package was sent to the Normandy and then inspected by EDI's sensors. John had not been on the Citadel yet, as he had not been allowed permission to go on shore leave yet, a right that he had sent for over email.

The package was then put on alert, and then it was realized that it was to be sent to John.

While helping Cortez move some food supplies in from the shuttles, Communications Officer Traynor came down to see John. "John," she said, "We don't know how, due to only recently you being put in the system, but you have a package. And the package has set off some alarms."

"Really?" aksed John, incredulously, "Are you sure there aren't any other John Spartans around?"

"It was labeled to be sent to the Normandy. It doesn't get much more specific than that."

"Alright, I've never actually gotten a package before, lets see it."

John opened it up and found inside a small chip and a note that said, "Place inside omni-tool."

John did so, and then popped up a hologram. There was an middle aged man with cropped hair, a vest and holding a cigarette. The man had a strange set of markings within his pupils and he began to speak, "This is a recording." He said.

"Oh, well that's good to know," said John.

"Greetings, John, we know about you. You have killed quite a few of my troops and you've not been in our galaxy very long. Normally you would have made quite the enemy, but from what the information I've been able to gather from the Krogan and those left alive after the attack on Sanctum, well it seems as if you are not from around here. Some would say that your arrival in our galaxy is a little, convenient. And why would you even fight for Shepard might I ask? Do you even know what this war is about, or are you some sort of automaton who does whatever its master bids? I'm not sure about you, but lets assume you have an inkling on what's going on, and that you decided to join the Alliance by choice.

"You are fighting on the wrong side. From what I have learned you came from a ship, a ship that came mysteriously out of nowhere and crashed into Tuchanka. You then tried to get to the Citadel by a Salarian Freighter that we attacked. And now , after seeing footage of you from the strike on Sanctum, we know that you have some skills, and that you can be an asset. So back to what I was saying about you being on the wrong side.

"The Alliance wishes to try and destroy the Reapers. We believe we can find a way to control us. So I offer you this, you can join us, make yourself useful, and we will reward you greatly. That is all, if you are interested there is a contact willing to meet you on the Citadel, at a set of coordinates that will be uploaded to your omni-tool. You will have to be alone if you wish to meet with the contact. I hope that you will choose to at least give us a chance."

The man disappeared. Traynor was stunned and John asked her, "What's wrong?"

"If I remember correctly, then that is the Illusive Man."

"Really? Why's he called that?"

"Well, nobody can ever catch him. Also, he's mysterious."

"Huh, and he wants me to join _his _Terrorist organization."

"Apparently, but that would be desertion."

"Of course, I will report this to the Commander."

John took an elevator upstairs and knocked on the Commander's door and then stood at attention. The door opened up and Shepard appeared, in casual shorts and an Alliance Navy T-shirt. Shepard gestured him in and John got to take a look around the cabin. There was a four poster bed, and a fish tank on the wall. There also seemed to be a chrome plated shower unit. Shepard turned around and said, "Something you need to talk to me about , Operations Chief?"

"I wanted to report this sir." John handed him the chip and Shepard put it in his own omni-tool.

Shepard said, "Hmmmm, alright thanks for telling me about this. I didn't know the Illusive Man was bold enough to openly try and recruit my crew."

"How long have you been fighting with him, if I might ask?"

"The Illusive Man helped me in my fight against the Collectors a couple months ago. Human colonies were being attacked, and since Cerberus is a pro human terrorist organization, well they wanted me to investigate. All I cared about was helping stop the Collectors so I agreed reluctantly. We are no longer useful to each other, so he figures he can try and kill me every chance he gets."

"I see. Don't worry Commander, I have no plans of desertion. Though I have to admit, I see the benefits of controlling the Reapers if what

he says is true."

"It could very well be true, but its too dangerous, and is wasting time when they are at our door step killing everyone. There's a good chance he could be indoctrinated as well, and listening to an indoctrinated man's twisted perception on reality is not going to win us this war."

"Of course, sir."

"Dismissed, Chief."

John saluted and left, thinking, _It would be unwise to leave besides, Cerberus killed all those people on the freighter. They obviously are not ethical. No, _Illusive Man_, I don't think I'll be joining you anytime soon. _John decided he would go tell Cortana and then head in for some rest to put the message out of his mind.

13. Science and War

Brothers In Steel Chapter 12: Science and War

The next day, John had to report to the war room for a briefing from Traynor. Apparently the meeting between the Krogan, Salarrians and Turians was taking place that day. Per for everyone's safety, all crew were to continue their assigned duties but entrance or disruption of the assembly was prohibited. The assembly was going to take place in the meeting room adjacent to the war room. John merely nodded, those activities having nothing to do with him or any orders he may receive. He decided to continue in the cataloging of various different crates. But then he ran into someone that he met the first day in the new galaxy.

"Hey!" said Urdnot Wrex as he stumbled across John working in the armory, "How'd you get on the Normandy, John?"

Wrex lent out and a hand and gave John a sturdy tug that was trying to be a handshake. The Krogan's arm was rough and scaly, kind of like touching sandpaper. John said, "Well, it's a long story."

"You must really be a great soldier if Shepard has you working here."

John realized that Wrex must be the Krogan clan chief, "Wait, so you are the Krogan clan chief?"

"Indeed."

"Wow, well this is convenient."

"Sure is, well you can tell me about your arrival on this ship later, I assume that there is an elevator somewhere in this ship? The elevators were always so damn slow back when I was adventuring with Shepard."

"Yeah," John pointed at the elevators, "they are over there. What exactly are the Krogan preparing to bring to this summit?"

"I'm not quite so sure I can share that, I meanâ€¦ you don't look

like you are high Alliance personnel."

"Right, need to know basis, well we'll find out from Shepard later if its important, I guess. Good seeing you Wrex."

"Indeed, hopefully I will get to fight along side you, might be nice to see what you can do with a gun."

John thought about the strange circumstances that had brought him into this world, and it seemed as if he was destined to become part of grand events. Later that day, he saw the Salarian ship. The Salarian Dalatrass was noticeable, as he or she, (John couldn't tell the gender), was surrounded by guards and wore a regal blue cape with a hood.

John wondered what would come of such a meeting. He then used the extranet to look more into the history of both the races and what they could bring to the table. It appeared as if the Salarians were masters of science and espionage, and if it hadn't been obvious from his encounters on Tuchanka, the Krogan were a race of proud warriors, almost invincible in power. But they both hated each other. That was going to complicate things, but _hopefully_, thought John, _the Commander is also a diplomat._

Apparently something had happened because over the communications, he was called to suit up, along with Liara, as they were going down to the planet of Sur'kesh with the Commander. The Commander had mentioned that he wanted to see John in action, _so this is my chance,_ thought John.

He prepped up and then grabbed his shotgun and a pistol, along with several thermal clips. Then he met Liara who was apparently going to battle dressed in her work clothes. He asked, "Where are your shields?"

"I have a light shield operating system in place around me. It will block small bursts of mass accelerator arms fire, and allow ultimate mobility."

John nodded in response. The Commander got on, dressed in full silver battle armor, with the N7 logo on his chest. Compared to the Commanders that John had served under, he was much braver, as they had never personally taken place on missions, the risk was too great. Therefore it was strange to be personally going with his superior on the mission. It didn't give him any morale boost though, as through what he had been, he was ready to take on pretty much anything that this galaxy would throw at him. The shuttle lurched and they were off. Wrex was also accompanying them.

The Commander said to Wrex, "We're headed down to the Salarian homeworld now, they aren't used to seeing Krogan here so lets keep it simple. We land, get the females and leave before anyone else changes their mind."

John nodded, understanding the mission parameters. He fiddled around with his gun while Wrex replied, "I still don't trust a word they say."

John understood Wrex's suspicion from the perspective of researching the Krogan. Shepard replied with, "Let diplomacy play out Wrex,

you'll get what you want."

"These females are the best and probably last hope for my people."

"We'll bring them back Wrex," said Liara as she walked in from the cockpit, "Don't worry."

"I appreciate that Liara, I wouldn't want anybody else along for the ride."

Everybody was silent for a few moments and then Wrex asked, "So how did he get on your ship Shepard?"

Wrex pointed in John's direction and Shepard answered with, "Who, Cortez?"

"I think he means me, Commander," said John.

"Yeah, this one is a good warrior, he wrestled and defeated one of my own."

"I had heard something about him landing on Tuchanka. We picked him up, floating about in space," answered Shepard

"Yeah, and then I figured there was no where else I could go, so I agreed to fight," said John.

"Brave, have you learned yet that the Normandy is drawn to â€|suicide missions?" said Wrex with a broad, toothy grin.

"I'm ready for whatever they can throw at me," John said.

"Good, because they can throw a whole lot."

John asked, "So what exactly have we come here to do?"

Shepard answered briefly, "There are some Krogan females here that are immune to the effects of the Genophage. We need them to synthesize a cure."

"Sounds delicate."

"Commander!" interjected Cortez, "Salarian Ground control is not giving us access to land."

"Tell them the Dalatrass authorized this herself."

John watched as Wrex got his shotgun primed and got up, John said, "You going somewhere?"

"I knew they would never keep their word, lets seem them try and stop a Krogan airdrop."

Wrex opened the window and jumped down on the ground with a humongous thud. After two Salarians failed to stop his assault, he then sent a wave of biotic energy at the nearest Salarian trooper who was scattered flying. Two red dots appeared on the Krogan's chest and he stopped moving. Shepard got out and waved John and Liara to follow. John followed Shepard's example.

Shepard said, "We'd like to avoid a diplomatic incident." There was a Salarian in black light armor talking to Shepard and his men surrounded Wrex. After a quick conversation, Shepard agreed to have Wrex put under guard. Wrex unhappily agreed to and responded by pushing one of his guards aside. John and Liara followed Shepard closely. The armored Salarian left them to their own devices and John stood around aimlessly.

The area where they were was set on a type of plaza. There was ceramic paneling on the architecture, and there was one elevator to the far end of the room and one to the side, where a strange creature was being brought up for study. Liara said, "I hoped I would never have to see one of those again."

The creature was about eight feet tall, and had a triangular mouth and what looked like eight black eyes. It stumbled a bit, being overweight. John said, "Ugly mother right there."

John walked around and saw a Salarian typing up on a Keyboard. Right next to him was a big red button on a keypad. Curious he went up to it, and then as he put his hand over it the Salarian a few feet away said, "Don't touch that."

John decided that it would be best not to touch whatever that thing was and kept moving on. A Salarian was blocking an exit off to the side, when John got too close the Salarian said, "This is a restricted area, please step away."

It appeared as if everywhere was blocked off to him, so he went and met up with Liara and Shepard at the check in station. The armored Salarian was there, along with a few others who appeared to be on break or something. Shepard said mockingly, "Enjoying the sights, Chief?"

"Sir, yes Sir!"

Liara laughed and Shepard let his eye get scanned by a device. They were then cleared to go downstairs. Then, out of nowhere and grabbing John's attention, sirens started to sound throughout the base. John heard a voice go off and say, "Threat condition two has been detected, Scramble readiness teams." Gun ships at the landing pad took off, and then Shepard asked the black armored Salarian, whether or not there was trouble brewing. John could sense something big was going and hurried into the elevator.

The elevator took them down three levels and opened up into a large room, that appeared to be one enormous lab structure. Cages were everywhere and Salarians scurried about, doing their work. A group of Salarians were standing by the elevator and one of them, an old looking, worn down Salarian with battered horns, and wearing a lab coat that was red, white and black said, "Ah, Shepard excellent timing, good to have you here."

"Mordin?" said the Commander, with an air of surprise.

"Eyesight still sharp, surprise understandable. Hadn't expected to return to work." The Salarian spoke strangely, and very quickly.

Liara said, "Yes, my sources said the doctor had returned to work."

"Yes, special consultant, had to be me, someone else might have gotten it wrong."

Then after looking behind him, the Salarian moved up to Shepard and whispered something. Liara looked at him suspiciously. John put it out of his mind and followed them along as they moved through the base. The warning siren was still on though, which was the most pressing matter to John. I want to know what the danger is, thought John.

As they passed by a room full of enormous dead bodies covered in tarp, Mordin said, "Females had weakened immune systems, side effect of Maelon's 'cure'. These," Mordin said, gesturing to the bodies, "Didn't survive."

"Maelon was the Salarian who made the cure?" asked Liara.

"Yes, was former student. Was unethical. Stopped him with help of Commander Shepard."

"But we saved the Data!" said Shepard.

"Indeed. Data saved, but not complete, and lacks crucial details to reconstruct cure. But still useful for synthesizing living tissue."

"So there's no females alive anymore?" asked John.

"No, one left, only survivor."

"Well, that's going to make things more difficult."

"Indeed. Arrive too late, cannot delay now."

Mordin led them on down the hallway, and presented them in front of a cage that was filled with smoke. John could make out the silhouette of a Krogan, in there and could see that was attached to some sort of restraining device. He wondered what kind of experiments were going on. In a way, it was similar to Spartan training, but even more desperate in appearance. John started to feel a bad taste in his mouth; this place was starting to seem more and more shady.

"Be careful, Krogan slow to trust."

The Commander walked up to the glass and said, "I'm Commander Shepard, Alliance Navy."

In a low, malevolent voice full of distrust, the Krogan said, "Are you here to kill me?"

"Goddess, what's she been through," said Liara. John looked behind him to see her using her omni-tool to scan the Krogan.

"Urdnot Wrex and I are here to take you to safety," assured Commander Shepard. John could tell that the Commander was genuinely trying to be sympathetic to the Krogan. This was a strange trait in a leader that he had not seen, with the exception of Sergeant Johnson.

"Why," asked the Krogan, "What am I to you?"

"You are the future of the Krogan race, I'm fighting for that."

As if on cue, the sirens escalated in pulled out his weapon and the female Krogan said, "Well I hope you brought an army."

The Salarians started to move around running and scrambling. A voice on the intercom said, "Enemy fighters have intercepted the base." The Salarians gave out orders to move all sensitive data to an off-site location. An attendant ran up to the Krogan's console and started typing keys. Shepard asked the Salarian, "What's the situation?"

"We have multiple ships inbound."

John said, "What kind of ships? Reaper forces?"

Shepard's omni-tool started to blink and out popped Wrex on a hologram monitor. The Salarian answered, "I don't know."

Wrex said, "Shepard, its Wrex. Cerberus troops are in the base. Get the females out of there now!"

"Only one survived Wrex, it might be safer down here."

Wrex said angrily, "What? I don't think so, I'm not going to let her die like the others, no deal. If you still want this alliance get her out of there."

John said, "That doesn't even make any senseâ€|"

"No time," said Shepard, "Release the female!"

"Can't," objected the Salarian, "Protocol states that during lockdown, no specimen,"

The Salarian was hit with a field of electricity that shocked him. John looked to see that Mordin had used his omni-tool to do such. "Objection noted," said Mordin, "Now please release Krogan."

"Nice." Said John.

Mordin got got inside a side-cage. "Need to monitor pod as it clears quarantine procedures. Meet us at next checkpoint Shepard. Likely Ceberus opposes Genophage cure."

The cage started to move up slowly, the sound of gears rumbled. Shepard said to the female Krogan, "You'll see Tuchanka again, I promise."

The cage disappeared, moving up into the ceiling. "Alright," said Shepard, "John take point , we move back up through the elevator now."

"Yes, sir."

John led the way back to the elevator. When he got there the Salarian technician was having a difficult time, banging against a console. "Don't know why it won't work, give me a minute," said the

technician.

John waited, and then the door lit green. John walked up to it and as the door opened he saw a strange device with a red blinking light in the center of the elevator. Shepard yelled, "Get back! It's a bomb!"

John quickly reacted and spun around on his heels, but the bomb detonated. The force of the explosion sent him flying into the air. Chips of wall fell all around and the Salarian technician was killed, green blood getting everywhere. The attack had begun.

14. Had Enough?

****Dear Readers,****

****As of late I have been away and just got back two days ago. I started working on this before I left and therefore could not update. Hopefully, not that I'm on summer vacation I'll be able to do updates at least every three days. :p Anyways, I'm back to writing, so please enjoy this.****

****Peace,****

****Gehenna79****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 13: Had Enough?<p>

John was stunned for a second but quickly got back to his feet. His helmet was dazed for a few seconds, the HUD flittering a little bit, but then set itself back to normal. A Salarian technician asked, "Commander Shepard, are you alright?" The Commander responded bluntly with, "Is there another exit?"

"Yes, there's one at the far side of the room."

"Then that's where we go, lets move!"

Liara was up, looking unharmed for the most part. John ran along side the commander and asked, "Orders sir?"

"Follow me and stop Cerberus from getting the Krogan."

"Got it."

They took a ladder up to the next level. If there had been no fighting going on, John would have taken a moment to look at the beautiful sunset and the glorious mountains, but the rest of the facility was in flames. Heavy fighting had been taking place, and John saw a group of Salarians firing at Cerberus troops across the river, on the other side of the complex. Out of nowhere, a Cerberus shuttle dropped in, firing rounds at the Salarians and scattering them down into the river below.

John did a barrel roll to get behind cover, and pulled out his pistol. The Commander got around the right flank and Liara fired a ball of blue energy that stuck to one of the troopers and then

started lifting the rest up into the air. John took the initiative, firing several shots at the soldiers, and downing two of them. Commander Shepard then pulled out an assault rifle and starting firing away at the remaining Cerberus troops.

"That can't be the last of them," said Liara.

"What was that thing you just did?" asked John.

"Singularity, I'll tell you more about that later."

"I got to get me one of those."

More Cerberus troops ambushed them as they moved on ahead. A Round hit the side of John's head and he muttered to himself, "Getting careless, got to remember how Mendez punished the careless." He pictured being forced sit out in the cold with no shirt on, and got to cover. He took out a few more of the troopers and watched as one of the shielded Centurions came up with a new squadron. Shepard took care of them easily, firing rounds from his flanking position. John switched to his shotgun and ambushed the last Centurion, and shot him in the face, sending pieces of gore flying.

The party came up to a door and opened to see an explosion rip through the wall and one of the large ugly beasts come out and smack away a Cerberus trooper. There was a jet of fire, but the beast seemed unaware, and after a victory roar, ran out the other way. John could see Shepard grinning as he said, "Look out, there goes the next Shadow Broker."

Liara looked askance and said, "Not funny."

John didn't get it.

To get around the flames, they had to jump across a crack in the path and jump over the broken window. After that, they continued to go up the stairs, when on their radios they heard Mordin yell, "Shepard, Cerberus troops at checkpoint. Attempting to kill Krogan, Need Assistance."

"I got this," said John, running to the side and firing a shotgun blast that killed a trooper. He ran up to where the Krogan was, and shot the trooper trying to blast his way in. Shepard and Liara finished up the rest.

John asked, "Are you okay?"

"Containment shield is holding, will repair is necessary. Can't speak for Krogan's health."

"I am fine, soldier." Said the Female Krogan.

"Everything's fine, Commander."

"Good job John, for taking the initiative, but its not over yet."

"Yes, sir."

The elevator moved up, but just as it was about to clear through the

ceiling, a Cerberus shuttle swooped in, and several troopers began firing at the elevator and at the team. John got into cover quickly, as broken shards of glass from the elevator fell down onto the ground. "Hurry! Next Checkpoint!" Yelled Mordin.

Shepard yelled, "Lets Move!" and took out one of the Soldiers, sending him down into the valley below.

A hole in the wall had been made by some Cerberus attack and the team pushed on through it. In front of them was another stretch of lab areas, where Cerberus forces were waiting for them. Just as John got his footing a gust of wind blew on him as two shuttles flew right by. One of them was the shuttle they had taken , and it was being chased by a white and yellow Cerberus shuttle.

Over the radio, Wrex yelled, "Shepard get cracking! I'll try to draw some of their fire."

The shuttle disappeared around the bend. John quickly got into cover again to try and take out the next set of troopers ahead of them. The corridor was linear; there were gardens full of ferns and conifers everywhere, and the Cerberus troops were using them to hide themselves. Shepard signaled for John to move around the left flank again. John did so, quickly sprinting behind some more troopers, two Soldiers and a Centurion, and John shot one down on the ground and wounded another. Doing a quick barrel roll, he watched as a glob of blue energy hit the Centurion and made him stagger. John shot again after a quick pump of his shotgun and the Centurion was dead.

"Cerberus isn't fooling around," said Liara.

"They are capable of anything," said Shepard.

"I'm kind of out of the loop," said John as he jumped over a support beam that had fallen, "but it doesn't seem very constructive to be fighting us while there's a war for survival going on here."

Shepard laughed slightly, "You're telling me!"

They got up to the next level and once again, Cerberus troops were waiting for them. This time however, there was a different kind of trooper, one that wore mesh armor and a helmet that kind of reminded John of the Security Helmet variant for MJOLNIR Armor. The troopers took a round object and laid it flat on the ground. It started to rise and out popped a rifle barrel. The machine then started shooting rounds at John, and he quickly dodged them before they could bring his shields down.

Liara yelled out, "I don't think going head to head would be a good idea."

"Alright," said John, "Time for more flanking."

John readied his shotgun. The Turret had pinned down Shepard but thankfully Liara used a Singularity on the troopers. The trooper who had laid down the Turret was still up. It looked like he had more turrets on his back, so John thought _Got to take him out, or else he'll set up another turret._

John pulled out a frag grenade, which was a small fist sized purple cylinder and flung it at the Trooper who had deployed the turret. The grenade exploded, breaking the trooper's shields. Quickly, John put his shotgun on the ground, and unholstered his pistol, just in time to get a perfect headshot. The Cerberus trooper fell to the ground, a pool of blood forming around him. The other troopers were easily taking care of by Liara and Shepard.

John noticed across the way, to be a bunch of cages with strange four legged animals that slightly resembled dogs but with snake like heads. They also had scales that were a radiant green. John pointed them out to Liara and asked, "What are those?"

"Varren. They are hostile predators, similar to Earth's wolves. They are somewhat related to reptiles though."

Through the next door, John watched as a Trooper was mauled and torn apart by one, viciously. Shepard fired a shot at the Varren, killing it. John remarked, "I'll keep that in mind, next time I see one of those."

The next room had a stairway, and Shepard said, "I'm going up top."

John watched as Shepard moved up and engaged the enemies up top. There were a few Cerberus troops below, but they were unshielded and were quickly picked up by Liara's Singularity. The pulsating blue orb swung them around, giving John time to shoot them down with his shotgun without any danger. Above them, Shepard fired from a hole in the ceiling, created by some sort of unknown explosion. The air smelled slightly of burnt ozone. John and Liara climbed up the ladder at the end of the hallway and met up with Shepard, who was waiting at the next door.

"Elevator malfunctioning Shepard!" yelled Mordin over the radio, "Need assistance!"

"Get them away from the female!" yelled Shepard.

Like before, John ran ahead to meet the enemies head on. After a quick, firefight it was over. Mordin instructed Shepard to find the power supply and turn it back on. While Shepard did that, John walked over to another set of Varren cages. On a computer there was a audio file read to play and Liara turned it on. A Salarian voice on the computer said, "Species 408- the varren- could provide a novel form of biological warfare. With enhanced size and intelligence, they could harass hostile civilian populations at minimal cost. Recommend project approval."

"These Salarians seem very shady," remarked John.

"They are scientists," explained Liara, "and politicians. They have always been good at adding more problems. They gave the Krogan technology to fight the Rachni, and then they held them back when they couldn't control them. The average Salarian is fine, but their leadershipâ€¦well, they are troublesome."

Shepard returned back and told them that the power was on. Unfortunately another group of Cerberus troopers had also arrived. "Protect the female at all costs!" yelled Shepard.

They took care of them quickly, and Shepard cleared them through the Checkpoint.

The female Krogan coughed and said exasperatedly, "I'm not your problem, Commander, you don't know me."

"But I'd like to, hang in there. How many more checkpoints?"

"Just one more. I hope Urdnot Wrex is still waiting."

"Wrex can't keep his hands off a fertile female. He'll be there," said Eve without enthusiasm.

John had a brief mental image of two Krogan mating but then shook his head and blocked it out. It was a scary image.

And just as the elevator disappeared through the ceiling for the last time, yet another squad of Cerberus troopers appeared. John ran up to cover and Liara used her singularity. Out of nowhere a missile hit a structural support and sent pieces of shrapnel flying, peppering Liara who fell to the ground. John ran to her and saw that she had a large incision across her leg, where blue blood was seeping out. "Don't worry, I got medi-gel," he said calmly.

He ran the omni-tool over her cut and the medi-gel zipped it back up. She said, "Thanks, I'm good to go, let's keep moving."

"Alright."

"Let's get the hell out of here!" said Shepard.

At the end of the hallway, there was a ladder overlooking the scenic vista. They climbed it up quickly and then encountered a group of Cerberus troopers. This one was much larger than any previous, and John counted that they consisted of two squads. A shot hit his shoulder and his shields flared up. Quickly he slid into a prone position and took out his pistol. He equipped a scope, then popped out of cover to try and get a headshot. With a steady hand, he quickly got a headshot on a trooper, sending bits of meat flying everywhere. Then John did a quick maneuver to the next piece of available cover. But then something unexpected happened.

Out of nowhere, a huge hulking mass came down and crashed in the middle of the battlefield. It was a huge armored body, a bipedal machine of war. Inside was one Cerberus trooper. John said, "What the hell is that!"

"Atlas Mech! Get to cover!" yelled Shepard.

"Door is damaged! Can't get out!" said Mordin as he comically tried to push against the door.

The Mech fired a missile in John's direction sending him flying into the air and landing on his back. With a few seconds' hesitation, he got right back up, and watched as the Mech fired a storm of rounds at the various pieces of cover, small gardens and supports. They were torn apart, causing Shepard to retreat to the upper gantry. John threw a grenade at the Mech, causing its shields to flare but no

permanent damage was done.

"How do we take this down?" Liara asked.

"I have an idea," said John.

"Let's hear it Operations Chief," said Shepard bluntly.

"Bring its shields down and I'll show you."

John ran out while Shepard yelled, "What are you doing?"

John started a sprint, and pulled out his shotgun as he ran to the other side of the door. Liara continued to fire her weapon, slowly bringing down the shields of the Atlas Mech. John then started running straight at the Mech and then, quickly using his super human abilities, did a running jump right at the Atlas Mech. As he jumped right onto the hood he let out a shot with his shotgun that pierced the glass of the Mech, sending pieces of glass flying everywhere with a tremendously loud _Crash!._ As this happened, he quickly grasped the top of the mech. He then grabbed the Cerberus trooper and flung him to the ground, as the trooper screamed.

John got down and silenced the trooper with his shotgun.

After dealing with a wave of troopers, Shepard said, "_What the hell was that_ Operations Chief?"

"Sir, I thought it would be worth the risk to try and pierce the glass and disable the pilot before it could possibly do more damage to our remaining cover."

"We'll talk about it later, but that was risky, you could have gotten killed if the Cerberus trooper had gotten wind of what you were doing."

Liara did a nod of approval towards John though, which meant she approved of his actions, giving John some satisfaction.

Wrex said over the radio, "I think that's it. Looks clear from here, I'm coming in now."

The shuttle slowly came in and parked on the landing pad. Wrex stepped out, shotgun in hand and shook hands with Shepard. "Had me worried there for a minute." He said.

Mordin led Wrex over to the females box and gestured with an outspread hand. Wrex pushed him aside and offered the female his hand and said, "Let's get you out of here."

In person, with no glass blocking the way, the Krogan female looked even more regal. John could tell her importance by just the way she moved. But then , when two Cerberus troopers appeared and looked as if they were about to shoot, the Krogan Female took Wrex's shotgun and shot them both down. She then gruffly handed it to Wrex and said with a tone of weariness, "I can handle myself,Wrex."

"Women," said Wrex.

As they left, John noticed one of the Cerberus troopers struggling to

get up, the trooper's face smeared with his own blood. John walked over to him and said, "What do you want with the Krogan?"

The Trooper tried to speak, but instead coughed on his own blood and laid down to die.

John shrugged and walked back to the shuttle, wondering what exactly was going on with the war he had just entered.

15. Impressions

Chapter 14: Impressions

The mission was a success, yet Shepard had not treated it as such. The fact that Cerberus had been able to find out when the Female Krogan was moved had troubled the Commander, and Mordin had postulated that it was an inside job, that someone within STG was indoctrinated by the Reapers and compelled to help Cerberus. However, they would never find out who actually did it. Shepard asked John up to the Commander's Cabin the next day. John guessed that it was to discuss the actions that John did concerning the Atlas Mech.

The elevator took John up and the doors of the Cabin opened up revealing a spacious room. There was a fish tank on the left side of the wall, where brightly colored fish swam around complacently without any fear or worry. To the right there was some furniture, a small couch and a bed with _pillows._

John hadn't used a pillow since he was a kid.

However, John focused and saluted the Commander who then gestured him to come inside and take a seat on the couch. John took a seat and stiffly stood at attention while the Commander stood and said, "You know why you are here?"

"I think so, Sir."

"Okay then, you can tell me."

"Its regarding the actions I performed when I engaged the Mech on yesterday's mission, sir."

"Right, now I'm not mad. I'm not even annoyed. I'm glad you did that, but you need to be aware that there's a much bigger war going on. And we are going to need you for that war. You haven't seen the Reapers yet. You haven't seen the grotesque infantry they employ. Cerberus isn't the real threat. So I need you to keep in mind that foolhardy actions are not tolerated. We all need to play it safe so we can continue the real fight."

"Yes,sir."

John doubted that the Reapers would affect him; dealing with the Flood was something that would make lesser men quiver in fear. All the Flood had done to him was make him break a sweat. But he wasn't going to back sass the Commander, and he could tell that the Commander was someone who had lost people to this new, dangerous enemy.

Then the Commander said, "Anyways, there is another reason I have called you up here."

"Sir?" asked Chief with a raised eyebrow.

"Your armor has returned, from what the science notes tell me, much of the technology tells me that it would not work for a regular human. But they think they can adapt the shield processes of your armor to work for our own, and thus, you have provided us with stronger shields for our troops. They also say that they were able to reactivate your shields as well. Now my question is this, do you want to take your armor back?"

"Sir, yes Sir!" said John loudly with enthusiasm.

"I thought so. Also, at some of the Technician's urging, they decided to add some upgrades to your armor."

"Upgrades? I thought that my armor was more advanced, sir."

"Yes, but as you will see, they thought that it would be prudent to incorporate some of our own technology. For example, there was a source of healing foam within your suit correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now its been fixed to use military grade medi-gel."

John nodded. It was logical to switch to whatever was in supply in this galaxy.

"I'll go check it out." Said John.

"Good, dismissed, Chief."

* * *

><p>John headed down to the loading bay as fast as possible. Rogers, Cortez and James Vegas were standing around the strange shipment. There was a shipment security guard standing by with a clipboard. She was short, had a bunch of freckles and slightly auburn hair and she spoke in a clipped tone, "Okay, I need a John Spartan to sign this shit."<p>

"I'm right here."

"About time, I've been waiting all day."

John signed quickly and then was given the codes in which to open the crate. With a few key pad presses, the top of the box became unlatched and the top slowly unhinged itself up. Chief took a look inside, where his armor was laying, inside a sort of polymer cushioning. What John saw inside was to even him stunning.

His signature armor was polished and shiny; all of armor no longer had any buffs or scratches or dings on it. His visor was the same as it always had. Thankfully, the scientists had thought it prudent to tamper with any part of his helmet. The neural interface was still intact. The body looked good as well, and as Chief deconstructed the layers, he saw that the gel layer had been revitalized. John wondered

if they took the gel out, reduplicated it and put it back together again.

The armor also had a change in color though, now it was no longer a shade of Olive, it was now a shade of dark Navy Blue, the same color as the armor that had been given to him. On the left side of the chestplate was a Logo that he had soon before on the commander: N7.

It took a little while and the help of the other crew men but he got it back on. The suit fit like a glove, comfortably giving John a better sense of security. The systems took about ten minutes to reboot, and his interface was the same as it had been before. His view was perfect, the polarized visor changing to suit to the amount of the light as he took a steady walk into the back of the hangar bay. The suit responded to his mental commands as always. But then he realized that there was a symbol on the bottom of the left of the screen that said, "OMNI-BLADE POWER METER", and he realized that an omni-tool and thus, an omni-tool had been installed as a new feature for his suit. He tinkered with his arm, and then realized that it was probably a function that he could activate with his mind. He thought about it and out popped a shiny, yellow blade. Thankfully, Cortez was standing behind him and did not get poked.

"This, is going to do some damage," said John with a grin.

* * *

><p>The next few days were pretty slow. Shepard, along with Garrus and Liara, went down to the planet of Tuchanka again for another op that John was not privy too. The day after that, they did it again and after a little debacle on whether or not the crew was allowed to know, Traynor told John that the op had been focused on the planting of a Turian bomb down on the planet of Tuchanka. There had been secrecy because they didn't want Wrex to find out about it.<p>

John spent most of his time either talking to Cortana, doing manual labor down in the armory and shuttle bay, or having a drink with some of the other crew members down in the lounge. Although he knew that he was slowly becoming less and less Spartan every day, he slowly began to enjoy this kind of life. _As long as I keep fit,_ thought John, _there's no way I could lose my edge._

After a week, John was itching to get into a fight, though and there was rumors that they might run an operation on some planet in the Rachni Relay.

John had learned from Liara that the Rachni were a race of hive mind insects that had been turned violent by the Reapers in order to weaken the Citadel races. Liara could only guess this was sometime after the Reapers realized that they could no longer use the Citadel to get into the galaxy. The Rachni were almost able to win, when the Salarrians found the Krogan, gave them weapons and forced them to fight against the Rachni.

The Rachni were defeated and were forced into extinction. But about three years ago when Shepard was fighting the Geth and Saren he came across the last Queen, who could possibly allow the Rachni to come back into existence. Shepard was given the option of completely killing the Rachni forever, but instead Shepard believed that they

should be given another chance, allowing them to flee and go to an uninhabited world and live peacefully. But now, according to Liara, the Krogan had heard rumors the Rachni were becoming aggressive. Shepard was going to take a team with him to check it out. John decided to request that he come along.

John saw Shepard coming down to the crew deck and approached him.

"Commander, I have a question if you don't mind."

"Alright, speak freely."

"I am requesting that I come along on the next ground mission, sir."

"Oh really?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alright, I take it you've heard about the problem?" Shepard began walking towards the engine gun's, also known as "Garrus's Workshop".

"Yes, sir, there are Rachni rumors."

"Okay, then you can come along. But we are making a stop at the Citadel tomorrow. I take it you know what that is?"

"A little bit sir, it's a space station."

Shepard laughed a little, "Its much more than that. I think you would benefit from a little shore leave."

Shore leave was something that John had never had time for. Usually he would get sent from one mission to the next, or back to Reach for a little down time before the next one.

"Alright sir, looking forward to it."

* * *

><p>The Citadel was one of the most amazing things that John had ever seen, and he had seen a lot of amazing things. It reminded him in some ways, the Ark, but unlike the Ark which was a desolate world with no people, the Citadel was a living, breathing city. The lights, the business and the inter connectedness of all the different races was something that he had never seen before. The fact that humans, and aliens of all different kinds had been able to make a society without trying to kill each other was the most stunning thing about it all. Taking an elevator down to the Presidium Commons, he looked out at the artificial lake and the palm trees and conifers and walked among the people, going on about their business, selling goods and services, and taking part in a collective society.<p>

The Citadel itself was the color of sterile white; it was in one word Clean. Of course John had been in clean environments, but not ones where civilization was kept and maintained. It was in a way overwhelming. John didn't show it, but inside he didn't know what to make of everything. Shepard asked him when they ran into each other

outside a small caf  , "What do you think of it?"

"Sir, its pretty damn amazing sir."

John decided to use some of his pay, (_Actual money!_) and buy a sandwich from the caf  . He sat down on a table and watched as the various aliens, like the Asari and Salarians walk around, and John also listened on the conversations they had about movies, plays, and the war.

If that was the one thing that was odd to John, it was the fact that the war seemed to not touch anybody's conversations. John wondered if what that was what life on Earth was before the Covenant abruptly invaded the planet.

After lunch he continued to look around, and then got a message on his omni-tool. James was calling him.

James informed him of a bar that was on a higher level, called Purgatory and wanted him to come up.

John said, "But don't we drink enough at the lounge already?"

James said, "What? You can never drink enough. Get up here _Silencio_!"

John took the elevator up to the bar. The bar was divided by levels, with one level on the bottom, a small middle level for private booths and a third level that had a lively dance floor, where members from all species were enjoying themselves. James waved John over from the bar on the lower level. John moved his way through the crowd of aliens and humans. A boisterous party of marines was over in a booth dancing on the tables, and a Salarian bartender was having a lively conversation with a couple of human females.

James said, "I'm glad you could make it."

"What's up with the _Silencio_?"

"Your new nickname. Thought it might fit you since you are pretty silent."

"Hmmm."

John ordered a drink and took it all once in a good shot. He stayed at the bar and watched the people and the movement. But soon he got bored. John said goodbye to James and said he was heading back to the ship. The day was over, and John had seen enough of the Citadel. On the way back into the ship he came across the pilot and the AI talking to each other.

"Jeff," said the AI, "Do you think that it is acceptable for me to defy an order based on moral grounds?"

"Um," the Pilot stuttered, "What did you do?"

"Jeff, I am asking a serious question,"

"Yeah, and I know you want a serious answer."

"So what do you think?"

"I think that you should consider giving me a kiss and maybe we'll talk."

"Maybe does not imply you willâ€¦!"

The AI paused and they both turned to see John just standing there.

John cleared his throat awkwardly and said, "Well I was just going."

16. Bug Hunt the First

****Hey everybody, ****

****Wow, its been a while since I've uploaded. I didn't mean to but I've been enjoying a summer of laziness, along with the fact that I've been playing Bioshock and Fallout New Vegas a lot. Don't know if I want to write any fan fic for either though. Both seem really complex and Fallout New Vegas is the only Fallout Game I've played, strangely enough. Anyways, I want to get back into regular updates, so here's Chapter 15.****

****Enjoy!****

****~Gehenna****

****Chapter 15: Bug Hunt the First****

One of the best things about his armor being returned was now Cortana could return into his armor and become one with him again. But first, he needed to get permission, as the AI core was often strictly under guard, and was also where the ship's own AI, EDI, had her data cores established. The room itself was usually only accessed by Engineers and Shepard, as well as EDI's detached body.

EDI's body spent most of the time on the Bridge, and although a crew member could contact EDI from anywhere on the ship, John felt like it might be appropriate to come and ask her in person. It would show her the seriousness of being reunited with Cortana.

John walked up to the bridge. At that time, the ship was floating around the Mulla Xul system. Standing still in space allowed anyone looking outside a window a view of the beauty of the stars, and that day the specks of blue, white and red, shone radiantly on from the Bridge's window. John was unsure as if he should salute EDI or not so he just said, "Ma'am."

The pilot, a thin, wiry fellow with a five o clock shadow, whom John had heard was called "Joker" by the crew turned and said, "Hey, EDI, looks like this one wants to talk to you."

EDI turned around and said, "Yes, Operations Chief, do you have a query?"

EDI was the image of an attractive human woman, though having no skin to speak of sort of dampened the effect it was supposed to have.

Instead she was bare metal, the color of silver. John thought it was odd that EDI had hair, or at least an illusion of it, and he wondered what sort of function that would have. In his universe, AI's were restricted to be computer programs on ships or in UNSC space stations. They would use whatever programming they had at their disposal, depending on how smart they were, to create an image in which they could represent themselves in, an Avatar being the term. No AI had ever decided to take on a real physical form that John knew of.

"I would like to request that my AI be returned to my armor."

"That can be arranged. But first I must ask to why it is necessary?"

"My reactions will be faster and more efficient with the addition of the AI."

"I see. I have talked with her. I thought it would be rude, to probe her data cores without her consent. She agreed to share with me some of her knowledge, but I am.."EDI got out her chair and stopped her sentence for a few seconds before saying, "unsure of how I can gauge the closeness of your relationship."

"Its close."

"I see. I only wish to know that having the AI will not hamper any efficiency on your part. To be frank, I wish to know whether or not you are attached to your AI."

John didn't know how to answer so he said, "We've been through a lot, yes."

"So, the answer to the question is yes?"

"Not enough though that it will affect my performance ma'am."

"Very well, you may have access. Also, you don't need to call me ma'am, EDI will suffice."

John gave a curt nod and said, "Ok, thanks, EDI."

"It is my pleasure to assist."

Later that day, before leaving on the mission to Utukku, John went down to the AI core to retrieve Cortana. He decided it would be best to let her know what was going on before he retrieved her. He brought her up on screen. Changes had happened to her; she looked different, her hair had become longer, her face had become more human, and less visible strands of data were seen. She also was taking on less of a pink but more of a violet color. John started to become concerned, as she was now starting to become more human in appearance, a sign of Rampancy. If she started to lose her grip on logic and rationality, she might have to be put down.

But then, he remembered the story James told him that EDI had taken over the body of an infiltration mech made by Cerberus. EDI had started out as a ship board AI, and had "possessed" the body of the infiltration mech. John wondered if maybe the same could be done for Cortana. He didn't know if that would keep her from going rampant,

but maybe if she could adapt into a normal life, maybe she could be saved. He resolved to tell EDI about it later.

She said in a gentle, soft voice, "Hello, John."

"I've come to get you out of there."

"I see you have gotten your armor back."

"Yes, and you can come back in."

"Alright, I've been dying to leave this cell."

John put the neural interface into Cortana's containment cube and after a few seconds, the neural interface made a ding noise that told him that she had successfully been transferred. He put her back into his helmet, and then he felt a slight tingle as the familiar entity was becoming one with his consciousness. Then he heard a sigh and Cortana said, "It feels so good to be back."

"Alright, think you are ready for combat?"

"I'm always ready to combat, but they've made some changes to your suit. Hopefully they are upgrades and not hindrances. I seem to be able to access every part of your suit still."

"They added an omni-tool to my suit, with an omni-blade. It's a thing, not sure really how it works but it interacts with technology, and I have a military model that can hack doors, terminals, and stuff like that."

"Less work for me, I remember when we were on High Charity that one time, I had to open all the doors for you."

"That must have been fun for you."

"The wealth of Covenant Data was extraordinary, but lets get back to the task at hand. Who are we fighting?"

"Don't know yet, we are going with the Commander to go check out a Krogan Scout camp. Some Scouts went missing so they sent out a company of soldiers to go check it out. Apparently some aliens used to live in the area a long time ago, and they weren't too friendly. They are concerned whether or not these aliens, the 'Rachni' as one of the crew told me, could be back and become a threat."

"Already gotten into trouble I see," said Cortana mirthfully "Lets go get ready then."

John went down to the hold, fully armored, and decided to take with him an Avenger Assault Rifle, a Predator Pistol and his trusty shotgun. One of the things that he found very useful and fascinating was that the weapons in this galaxy folded up on one's back. Back when he fought the Covenant, due to the size of the weapons, he could only carry a maximum of two usually.

The trip down to the planet didn't take long. John took a look out the "window", a holographic terminal that represented what was outside, and saw that the planet was an expanse of barren, red rocks, filled with canyons and low brush. It looked sort of desolate and

unforgiving. The perfect place for dangerous aliens to hide.

Shepard had decided to bring EDI along on that mission. John hadn't known that EDI was capable of fighting, and now was intrigued to see what she could do.

Shepard was wearing his same signature silver armor with the N7 logo on his shoulders. He turned to John and EDI and said, "Our back up is waiting at drop off point. Aralakh Company, Krogan Commandos."

"That is correct," said EDI, "They are an accomplished unit. Made famous for their decisive action liberating a colony from Batarian pirates."

"Good to hear," said Shepard approvingly, waving his Mattock Assault rifle around for emphasis, "Other than that, there's been no word from a team of Krogan scouts since they went through the Rachni Relay."

"There are many reasons that communications could be disrupted," said EDI.

"We don't know much, but no Rachni activity has been reported."

"Then why are we here?" asked John.

"To assess the situation," said Shepard, "Its troubling there are rumors at all. Three years ago I let the last Rachni queen live on the condition that she never bother other species again. She claimed that the Rachni were peaceful, made violent in the wars by the Reapers. I still wonder as to what motives the Reapers would have had to starting that war."

EDI said, "Maybe it was to weaken them before the Harvest began?"

John then joined the conversation and asked, "How come you let them live sir?"

Shepard replied, "I didn't think I was the one to judge whether or not a species should go extinct. I sure as hell wouldn't want the Rachni to kill off all humans if the roles were reversed. Besides, she had done nothing to humanity."

"Hmmm."

Cortana said privately to John, "The Commander seems to be merciful. Maybe too merciful."

Quietly, John said, "Maybe."

"Here we are," said Steve , "Radio in when you need a pick up."

They stepped out onto the ground of Utukku, and John felt the crunch of dirt as his boots met the earth. In front of him were Krogan, covered in black battle armor. But one particular Krogan, a huge one with silver armor and a bumpy, uneven faceplate, came up through two other Krogan and gave Shepard some friendly shoves on the shoulder. This Krogan was not like the others, his head crest was different,

not fully fleshed out. He also was of a different skin tone, more like a light salmon color, as opposed to the tan that most Krogan, like Wrex were. He also had very few scars, another thing that set him apart from the other violent reptiles.

"SHEPARD! SHEPARD!" said the Krogan with an air of utter happiness.

Cortana said, "Well this is an obviously a friend of the Commander."

Shepard smiled and said, "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same question. Didn't those idiots lock you up?"

John became interested now, wanting to know if possibly, his Commander had been put in jail.

"They did," said Shepard, "Put me in lockdown to keep the Batarians off me. Didn't want problems with the council while they prepared for war. But the situation changed."

"Yeah they got bigger problems alright, that's why I'm here running Aralakh Company. They're tough," Grunt gestured over to the Krogan gathering around the trailer, "Think they're invincible, crude but effective."

John saw a few of the Krogan not wearing helmets have large toothy grins.

"Sounds familiar Grunt," said Shepard, "How'd you go from being new and unproven to having your own command?"

"Heh. Wasn't easy. When Wrex put Aralakh company together he needed a leader who represented the future of our species. Thanks to you, I was an equal member of Clan Urdnot, and being the strongest, I was chosen to lead this honored company."

"Doesn't lack for confidence does he?" quipped Cortana. John shushed her, and Grunt looked at him, noticing.

Grunt took a small step over, leveling his face above John's flat helmet. He said, "Who's this Shepard?"

"Operations Chief John Spartan, Alliance Marine."

"He's a special," said Shepard. "I'll tell you more later."

"Armor looks hi-tech."

"That's cuz it is," said John without interest.

Grunt said nothing for a second after leaving his stare down with John and then said, "Hard to believe that this might be Rachni. Rachni, a chance to face the old enemy? Impossible to resist."

"We're don't know if the Rachni are involved with this at all. We're here to find the scouts. I didn't see any signs of activity on our

approach," said Shepard.

"Agreed," nodded Grunt, "but this place smells wrong."

"Smells?" said John.

"An instinct, if you will."

"Hmmm."

"Our scans show that the tunnels lead to a large central point. If we're lucky, it's a nest."

"A nest would be more efficient for us," said John.

Grunt only made a small laugh, and then called his troops to movement. "Grab what you need Shepard, and meet us at the Scout Camp."

Shepard nodded and the Krogan left. John moved into the buildings, taking a look around to see if there was anything useful for them to use. Sitting on a desk, undisturbed by anything, was a Claymore shotgun. Remembering the time killing the Pyjaks on Tuchanka, John decided to pick up the claymore and take it with him. It felt good, more sturdy than the Scimitar.

Shepard said approvingly, "Find something you like, Chief."

Cortana said on their radio channel, "Just a little pick me-up."

"Was that your AI?" said Shepard, intrigued.

"Yes, sir," said Cortana.

"Alright then, lets move on then."

And so they did.

17. Meanwhile

****MOAR UPLOADS :p****

* * *

><p>Brothers In Steel Chapter 16- Meanwhile |<p>

True to their word, the Krogan had found the Forward Unto Dawn, and had decided to pick it clean of anything valuable. The weapons they found, such as SPUNKR-missile launchers, Battle Rifles, MA5B assault rifles, and M90 shotguns, they decided to toss away, as they were not as advanced or effective as what they already had. The large pile of weapons was eventually burnt down to slag, while the metal from the ammunition was used to make mass accelerator rounds for the Krogan's own weapons.

A few Covenant weapons were also found and these were of greater interest to the Krogan. They tested them quite a bit on local fauna, such as the Klixens and feral Varren, and found that plasma weaponry

was quite effective, quite able to suit their needs. The Krogan took about ten of them , and decided that once the war was over, they would hire private contractors to unlock the weapons' secrets and possibly manufacture them. There were also a few vehicles, including the Warthog that Chief and the Arbiter had taken off the ring. These were taken back to the Urdnot camp, as wheeled vehicles were more fit for moving across Tuchanka's nuclear wastes.

The salvage teams continued to get what they could, but the advancement of Reaper Scouts prompted Urdnot Wrex to call back them to safer areas of operation. A few Krogan were no match for a Reaper Destroyer, of which several had been moved down to the planet in preparation for an invasion. And because the Krogan had to hastily move out they never checked the whole ship, for deep within a nook in the ship's walls, something alien, something that should have never been there, was still alive, waiting for the first chance it could to leave.

One lone Varren, after having its pack killed by a group of Cannibals moved through the area, underneath the Forward unto Dawn. The scaly cross between mammal and reptile was seeking shelter, and climbed into the ship. The ship rustled and creaked underneath the creature, and the Varren became wary, and slowly continued into the ship.

The Krogan had not been gentle; they had ripped apart doors in their wake, they had moved apart pieces of bulkhead and left them where they were. The Varren moved through the ship's mess hall, of which the Krogan had moved all the tables to the far end of the wall and had started picking up the floor boards. There was a broken Assault Rifle on the ground along with a pile of dirt in a corner. The Varren sniffed the ground; something wrong had passed through here, but whether it was predator or prey was not known.

A hissing noise sounded, and the Varren saw a shot of green move behind a piece of metal stacked against the wall. The Varren was intrigued.

The Varren moved in, closer, and sniffed. The table banged and fell over and the Varren jumped back in surprise. He saw a creature run out to another table and then the Varren chased and pounced it. What happened next was completely unexpected.

Like a fist, something hit the Varren in the jaw, but something stayed there, clamping onto the jaw of the Varren. A shot of pain hit the Varren's throat and it felt something pierce its throat. A lump was attached to him, and hot, sticky blood spurted everywhere. The Varren started to choke, its throat being filled with what felt like tentacles. Then a shock so powerful knocked the Varren out and it felt no more.

A few minutes of silence passed. Then, the body of the Varren, covered in growths and strange roots growing out of its back and out of one of its eye sockets, got up. Its body was limp but still moving. It was no longer a Varren, it was now a vessel of death and destruction.

This vessel was the ****Flood****.

****Hello all,****

****Well, that was certainly the plot twist wasn't it? I considered that if John and Cortana survived, a Flood infection form could. And maybe a sneaky one latched onto the Forward Unto Dawn at the last second right? :p Also, would anybody good at making art want to make me a picture for the story? I would like to see a Master Chief with blue armor and maybe an omni-blade with a Reaper in the backdrop? That would be awesome, but its ok if nobody can work miracles haha

****Anyways, enjoy!****

*** * ***

><p>Brothers In Steel Chapter 17: Bug Hunt The
Second

The metal trailer slid into the canyon, with a prodigious thud and a loud slide of rocks and debris. John was knocked to his feet and EDI somehow managed to keep her balance. Shepard was completely alright, and dusted off his greaves.

"Shepard!" yelled out Grunt, from the top of the canyon, "You still in one piece?"

"Looks like we're all okay. Keep in radio contact!"

The cavern was dark and ominous. John didn't feel any concerns, he had done this sort of thing before, though he wasn't about to become overconfident. He pulled out his Claymore shotgun. Shepard said, "Chief, take point."

"Sir."

John walked in, at a slow pace, taking an examination of his surroundings. He walked down a little and saw a corpse; a Krogan, laying in a frozen spasm of pain, still clutching a weapon in his hands.

John said, "Found a dead Krogan."

"Check if he still has his weapon," said Grunt over the communicator, "He won't be needing it anymore."

The weapon appeared to be a gun with a bottle strapped to the top. John pulled the trigger, and a small jet of flame came out from the barrel. From behind his helmet, John grinned. Flamethrowers were fun.

In front of the body though was something strange. A blockade of strange fibers was covering up the tunnel. EDI postulated, "Is thatâ€¦webbing?"

John fired the flamethrower, and the webbing melted away easily without effort. The rest of the tunnel was before them, and John continued to move in, checking his corners and waving his flashlight around for safety.

The cavern became significantly larger. Strange blue light trickled up from underground pools and strange luminous mushrooms. John looked around, continuously moving forward, but keeping his head checked. Then he saw a flash of movement and spun toward it. A strange _skree_ sound followed.

"Did anyone see that?" he said.

"Confirmed," said EDI.

"Lets continue moving," said John.

They turned around a corner, and right in front of John, were several bulbous objects on the ground. They looked somewhat like eggs to him, and if that was the case, then this was a nest. John used the flamethrower on the eggs, and they erupted with a squelch and popped out strange liquids. A dropped landed on John, and his MJOLNIR shields sizzled.

"Ah shit, its acid." Said John.

John continued to clear out the pods, but eventually ran out of fuel for the flamethrower. He tossed it unceremoniously aside and then decided to use his pistol instead. The work was slow, tedious, and there always seemed to be more of them around a corner. They seemed to know when a person was nearing too, and would explode when John came too close, sending bits of acid flecking onto his shields.

Eventually, after burning through more walls of webbing, they reached a very large open chamber. The team dropped down onto the ground. And then the Reapers attacked.

A monstrous, giant insect appeared out of nowhere on a rock outcropping. It had a sac for a body and a few pincer like legs, but on its head were two large cannons. Blazes of heat and fire shot their way out at John and Shepard, who both got quickly to cover.

But then, strange monstrosities, unlike anything John had encountered appeared. They were humans, or at least had once been, and their skin had been turned to a mottled gray, with their eyes glowing blue, like cinders. They moaned in such a terrifying way that a lesser man might cringe. They moved up, without any regard for safety without any tactics in mind. While firing his claymore at two of them, John asked, "What are these things?"

"Husks." Answered Shepard, "These are Reaper forces. I'll explain more later."

The Husks fell down easily, their bodies ripped in half by the force of the Claymore's spread.

John loaded a thermal clip in and then two blue lasers appeared on his armor.

"What the â€œ"

The Insect Cannon fired two shots of John, one making a hit, taking out a good portion of John's shield. Cortana yelled, "Keep your head

down!"

"You think?" replied John , unamused.

"Those things will ravage our shields."

"Move up!" yelled Shepard, who went around the right side, firing bursts of Avenger fire onto the Ravager, as John decided to call it.

John got behind a piece of cover, and realized the Ravager was right above him. He quickly got up, and then fired his Claymore directly into the beast's sac. The Beast exploded, and small insects, flew about, one of which landed near John's feet. It exploded in a tight _pop_, and acid stained John's boot.

"Rachni presence confirmed." Said EDI.

Shepard radioed Grunt, and said, "Grunt, there are Rachni down here, modified and very dangerous."

"Finally," said Grunt with zeal, "Something to kill."

* * *

><p>Another hour of moving through the corridors and taking out eggs took place. This was very irritating, as they couldn't let up their guard, but no enemy presence persisted. Then, as the team appeared in a large, rounded cupola, they saw the Krogan team, led by Grunt, shooting at modified Rachni troops pouring out of a hole in the cavern wall.<p>

The Krogan stood out in the open, and were completely exposed to the enemy's fire. John watched as Grunt charged head on into a Ravager, pushing through it and knocking it to the ground, then following up with a deadly Claymore blast to the head.

"Shepard, we're blocked!" yelled Grunt.

"Hang on, I'm on it!" replied Shepard.

They moved in and John melted a layer of webbing.

But out of nowhere, several eggs exploded, and a swarm of agitated Rachni babies jumped out . One latched onto EDI, who frantically tried to brush it off. John had one cling onto his face. He reached up and threw it away where it then popped and exploded with acid.

John saw another layer of webbing in front of him, and melted that too, and felt his shields go down, as more of the Rachni babies attacked from behind. "Get my back!" he yelled out.

"There's the power node!" yelled out EDI. A little while before they had encountered a Reaper barrier, and had disabled it by destroying a power node in another tunnel. John assumed they had to do the same and lit the node on fire. It shattered, and a door across the room opened.

The Krogans backed up while firing shots at the Rachni. A Ravager

fell, and then the others retreated falling back into some crevices in the rock.

"Thanks Shepard," said Grunt, jumping down onto the ground. "We found the Scout team, they were hit hard, and they moved in here to drop us weapons. They knew the next team would need help."

Cortana said quietly, "They sacrificed themselves to give us this chance at destroying the nest. Lets make it worth it."

"Anyways," continued Grunt, "That wasn't webbing stopping us. It was Reaper Tech. Which definitely proves the link. I think they are breeding an army down here."

"Agreed," said Shepard.

"The Rachni have backed off for now. But they can still smell our wounds. Any worthy enemy would regroup and finish usâ€¦soon."

Shepard paused for a second in thought and then said, "We're close Grunt, and those barriers were protecting whatever is down there."

"Alright," said Grunt, "We'll stay here and hold them off, buy you some time."

"Good luck." Said Shepard.

"I don't need luck," said Grunt with an air of confidence, "I have ammo."

"That was cheesy," said Cortana.

"Pretty much," said John.

Shepard turned and smiled and said, "That's just Grunt."

The Krogan turned and left to guard the passage. Shepard went up to small crack, big enough for a man to slip through by laying prone and crawling. "Only way is through here. Who's excited to go first? EDI?" said Shepard amusedly.

One of things about Shepard that John had noticed was his sense of humor in some of the oddest times.

"I'll go," said John.

John pushed his way into the crack, and slid down to the exit, onto a hard, stone floor. Where he exited out was a huge cavern, unlike any before, and there were mechanical bits of Reaper tech protruding out of the walls, and from underneath the ground.

"What is this?" said John.

Then right in front of them, a huge barrier erected itself. Two barriers also erected themselves to the side of the small bridge to the "island."

"Where's the node for this?" asked John rhetorically, the realizing

that it was up above him. A node was located right on the wall, about ten or so feet above. He pulled out his assault rifle and then fired a burst into the center of the node. A barrier to the left of them fell down, and revealed that several Husks and a few strange new enemies were waiting.

They were taller, and seemed humanoid as well, but they appeared to have more than one face. They looked composed of several bodies, all at disjointed and disconnected angles, and they let out a fierce battle cry.

The monstrosities would go down though, and John fired right at their heads. A Husk came up to him on his left side, prompting Cortana to shout out, "Left!"

He activated his omni-blade and then swung around, decapitating the bastard and letting blue-black blood shoot out like a geyser. John got into cover and shot down some more coming his way. EDI shot out a burst of fire from her omni-tool at a Ravager, who then burned away and exploded in a splash of acid and guts.

After burning ammo through the Reaper forces the team found another node. They shot it and it was revealed that the other barrier, on the right side of the "bridge" was now down. With luck, the node deactivating the main barrier would be on that side. They ran over to the other side, and engaged the forces guarding that node as well.

It seemed very convenient to John that the node that activated the main barrier was behind the second barrier. It almost felt like a game. Almost.

They managed to turn it off. Another wave of Reapers came, and they fell down within the same amount as the first two waves.

A loud noise, like shrill, sounded throughout the cavern.

Grunt's voice came up on the communicator. "Shepard, the Rachni are backing off. Whatever spooked them won't last. Finish the job!" He growled.

Shepard brought down the last barrier, and they moved in.

And before them, was something monstrous.

19. Bug Hunt the Third

Shepard asks some really stupid questions sometimes.

Gehenna

* * *

><p>Brothers In Steel: Chapter 18: Bug Hunt The Third<p>

The creature propped up in the central chamber was a monstrosity the kind of which John had never seen. It was a huge insect, with a triangular head consisting of a large beak and two beady eyes. The

creature was covered in tough, armor like plates, and had some sort of restraint around it. Obviously it was not there by choice.

"Silenceâ€|"

Something spoke, a thick gravelly voice, but not just one, a bunch of voices tied together. John noticed that there was a dead Krogan on the ground, along with several dead Krogan strapped to the walls in sticky webbing.

"Commanderâ€|" said John, unsure of what was going on.

"The maddening sour note has ceased." Said the Krogan body.

"I've seen this before," said Shepard, "The Rachni is using the dead bodies to convey its message. Its speaking to us through them."

Cortana said, "Fascinating."

"Are you the Queen I let go on Noveria three years ago?" asked Shepard.

"Yes. We listen for the Children," the Krogan voices said sadly, "They are silent. The machines come, and take them to war. They DIE!" The Krogan voices yelled angrily, "Alone. Silent. Far Away."

"The Reapers did this to you?"

John wondered why Shepard would bother asking such obvious questions.

"Yes. The sour note of the machines is everywhere!" the voices sounded like they were in agony, struggling to form sentences.

"I gave you a second chance," said Shepard, annoyed, "You promised not to interfere anymore. The Rachni were supposed to disappear!"

"Weâ€|rememberâ€|we kept our promise, retreated back through the relay, and we started a new home. Beautiful children. Harmony. But," the voices became angered once more, "The Machines came! They hurt our song! Their shriek of sour notes drowned us out."

Shepard replied, "They can't hurt you anymore."

"Yes," said the Rachni, "We understand."

"Can you still feel the Reapers," asked Shepard, "Can they influence you?"

"We hear the machines," said the Rachni queen with pride, "But they cannot control us."

"That node," said Cortana, "Looks like it would free her."

"Yes." agreed Shepard.

"Please free us!" said the voices.

A loud boom echoed and then the Rachni queen let out a shriek, "The children, they return! They will destroy us all! Release us!"

John felt as if the Rachni queen shouldn't giving the orders considering her position. On his radio, he heard Grunt's voice, "We're getting movement here. A lot of movement."

"Copy that, Grunt." Said Shepard.

"What's our next move?" asked John.

"Are you capable of fighting the Reapers?" said Shepard, ignoring John's question. John had a feeling that Shepard was going to try and get the queen to safety. A risky move, but with potential benefits. Choices like this were sometimes difficult for John to decide, it was far easier to receive orders and carry them out. In Shepard's place though, he would have done the same.

"WE!" yelled the Voices with vigor, "WILL FIGHT FOR OUR UNBORN CHILDREN!"

"The Queen is badly wounded," said EDI, "She will need time to escape."

Another boom echoed. Grunt's voice came back on the comm, "We are running out of time! If we stay here, Aralakh company is dead, is that clear?"

The Krogan can't be helped if we get the Queen out, thought John.

Shepard responded quickly, "Listen up, Aralakh company holds the Rachni off while the Queen escapes. We'll buy you some time. Grunt, fall back to our position and lead us out."

"DAMN YOU SHEPARD!" yelled Grunt angrily, "I'M LEAVING MY TEAM, ON MY WAY!"

Obviously, due to the Krogan hating the Rachni, sacrificing Krogan to save a Queen would make Grunt furious.

"Commander!" yelled EDI.

"That's an order! She's too valuable an asset to lose!" said Shepard.

Shepard fired a shot into the node, and the Rachni Queen was freed. She roared and her beak opened up, similar to an Elite's mouth. No longer restrained, she looked impressive and powerful.

An explosion from behind them drew John's attention. Standing in the smoke, holding a shotgun, was Grunt.

All Grunt did was huff and Shepard said, "Come on, we're leaving."

The cavern was long and spacious, and the team was able to get a running start. But Rachni soldiers up above them shrieked and prepared to block them. A shot from Grunt's shotgun brought down one

from an above balcony, and then a few others appeared behind them, laying down fields of fire.

They continued to run at a break-neck pace, ignoring Rachni soldiers, surprised at their movements, and jumping over fissures in the rock. A piece of rock fell from the ceiling and nearly hit John. John wasn't breaking a sweat though, and calmly continued to follow Grunt.

There was a tunnel, and the team went in for refuge. John slowed himself down, and saw that Grunt and Shepard had stopped.

"Why?" began John.

"Shuttles down this path. I'll hold them off. Get out of here Shepard" yelled Grunt, his teeth bared in savagery.

"I can help him," said John.

"Can you?" said Shepard.

"Trust me, I've been outnumbered before."

"Grunt?"

Grunt sneered and said, "One's better than two, but get out of here if I go down."

"Alright," said Shepard, "We're going."

Grunt gestured to John after they left, "Follow me."

Cortana did not approve, "I hope you know what you're doing."

In front of them , several Rachni prepared themselves for battle slowly moving up. More Rachni were appearing from above, and a few were crawling from below. The bulbous creatures hissed and shrieked, and smaller ones crawled all around. "Back to back!" said John.

Grunt and John put themselves together, John facing the left, and Grunt facing the right. The Rachni charged in fury.

They put the Rachni down with brutal efficiency. John brought down two in one shot, and Grunt pushed back with his bare hands any that came up to close. The two warriors rotated , trying to cover all sides, keeping the Rachni at bay.

"Don't get to close!" said Grunt, referring to the edge of a steep cliff.

They continued to hold their ground in the center, but John was running out of ammo, fast.

"Damn it." Said John, as his claymore went dry. Pulling out his Avenger would take too much time, so he quickly brought out the Predator and blasted a Rachni at point blank range before it could jump on him.

"Too Close!" yelled John, "We need to get the hell out of

here!"

Grunt growled and then let out a mighty roar, "I AM KROGAN. Get out here, I'll distract them!"

"What?"

"No time to argue! Get going."

John snapped around and took out another screaming Rachni, then Cortana said, "We need to go now!"

John scowled and said, "Alright."

"GO NOW" said Grunt as he roared charged head first into a mob of Rachni. The Rachni toppled him over and proceeded to stomp on Grunt and bite at his face and back. John took the initiative, and after stabbing through two Rachni, was home free. He looked back, and saw Grunt lift them off and then start bashing them with a ripped off Rachni cannon, bashing them and flattening them like obscene rotten fruit.

John wouldn't move. Then he said , "No."

John began to run, Cortana yelled at him to stop but he ignored her. He ignited his omni-blade and then slashed at a Rachni trying to smother Grunt. It felt apart in half and John quickly moved to the next one. Grunt got up and then used his hammer to flatten some more. Then he yelled, "Lets get out of here!"

"Alright." Said John.

They ran as fast as they could, both of them drenched in acidic Rachni blood. They ran, and ran, and ran until finally the noises of the Rachni were no more and then they stopped.

"Thanks." Said Grunt, panting.

"No problem."

Grunt took a brief pause then said, "Hey, what are you? How can you not be a little tired?"

"It would take too long to explain, so I'll just say that I'm physically fit."

"Heh. You're a freak of nature, but you have my respect. Now let's get out of hereâ€¦um, what's your name?"

"John."

"John."

And so they walked out, with a shuttle waiting in the sunset. And John could hear Grunt say exasperatedly to Shepard, "Does anyone have something to eat?..."

****Here's another one. Enjoy!****

****~ Gehenna****

*** * ***

><p>Brothers in Steel Chapter 19: Rapture<p>

Cerberus Operative Michael Shay crouched down on the red Tuchanka soil, and held his Phalanx Pistol Mark III at the ready. It was a small thing, with a white curved handle and a black barrel. Wearing white prototype Cerberus armor, he was well prepared for any attack, but he still had a feeling of apprehension from the untimely demise of one of the Privates, Private Wesley who had gone down to check out the noises coming from down in the canyon five minutes ago, and had not returned. Now it was up for Shay to find out what happened.

He slowly moved up. His armor did not have cooling units and the weather was close to a hundred degrees. Shay walked down, and then took cover behind a wall of red stone. The area they were in was about south of a recently taken Krogan Air to Space cannon. Shay had been part of a five man team that was sent to perform recon in the area.

Shay turned his head around the corner and saw the dead body of Wesley, lying on his chest, a strange , mottled gray-green orb attached to the back of his skull. What had happened to him. Then, Shaw saw the body of what looked like a Varren near by. The Varren was dead, but it appeared as if its body had exploded, in a mass of green goop.

Shay took an aim with his Phalanx to scope out the area and moved up to the body.

The body was still, Wesley was definitely dead. Shay took a look to examine the body.

Then it moved.

The body shook around feral like, and let out a strange ominous growl.

"What the hell?"

The body got up and slapped him in the face, sending Shay to the ground. The body of Welsey was still wearing its armor but had green and orange growths, like gnarled roots, sticking out of the arms and chests. It growled at him

Shay quickly shot at the creature, but it seemed to not care, and it limped at him and charged.

Shay did a barrel to the right. The creature swung its arm around.

A shot came from above on the top of the canyon; two of Shay's men shot out a net from a net gun. The net trapped the creature, bringing it down to the ground. Quickly, Shay used his boot to clamp the net to the ground, the creature flailing about.

Shay panted for a second and then examined the thing up close.

It appeared to be Wesley's body but being controlled somehow, by some sort of unknown vector.

With anyone else in the galaxy, a normally sane person, they would have destroyed the thing right there. But Shay was Cerberus, and they always wanted to try and learn more, in order to try and find more ways to further the cause of humanity. Whatever this thing was, thought Shay, it was worth preserving.

"Get me the Illusive Man. Tell him we found something worth his attention."

* * *

><p>The mission on Utukku being a success was a significant boost to crew morale and even John felt a little happier from it.<p>

One of the things about being on the Normandy though that John noticed was how the Commander seemed to enjoy getting to know his crew. He had seen the Commander go twice to talk to the Krogan female inside the sick bay and also to talk to Garrus who was either in the lounge drinking or attending to the Normandy's guns.

So it was no surprise that one day, while merely reading about the history of the Quarian-Geth conflicts, the commander walked into John's room.

John stood at attention, giving a stiff salute that the Commander responded to with an "At Ease." John got back to his seat and waited for the Commander to say something. The Commander walked over to the window, looked at the engine core that was pulsating purple and blue, then without looking at John he asked, "So how have you been fitting into the Normandy?"

"This an off the record thing, sir?"

"Of course, John."

"I have adjusted well sir."

"Good," said the Commander, taking a seat on John's chair. John leaned up against the wall casually. John was not used to, nor good at conversation, so he stood there silently.

"So, you told me when we first met that you were aâ€|"

"Spartan, sir."

"Right, obviously they taught you how to fight. And they gave you some impressive toys."

"Yes, sir."

"How many ships like this one have you served on?"

"Too many to count, but the one most like the Normandy was the Forward unto Dawn. It was a small frigate, not too powerful, but fast."

"So, in your universe, how was Humanity when you left it?"

"Hard to say. When I left it to do battle, it was under siege and occupation by the Covenant. Of course, you don't know who they are, so the Covenant is a conglomeration of alien races unified underneath a common religion. I never asked them what it was called, too busy shooting them."

Shepard put his hand up to his chin, and stroked it, in thought, "We've had our share of problems with aliens here."

"The Reapers?"

"Yes, but thirty years ago, the Turians, Garrus's kind, engaged us because we tried to activate a dormant mass relay. They fought a war, only lasted a few months, but, if the Council hadn't intervened they might have found Earth, and blasted it back to the stone age."

John thought about telling him of how the Covenant turned the planet Reach's surface into nothing but glass, but instead said, "I can relate."

"So, you think Earth is fine now?"

"Honestly no, I think it will be quite a while before Earth can fight off the Brutes, the last organized faction of the Covenant."

"Brutes? What are they?"

"Big dumb apes."

Shepard laughed, "Dorry, I know I shouldn't be laughing at that, but the idea of that is humorous at least in my mind."

"Eh, doesn't matter, I can't do anything about it from here. And I will probably never be able to return."

"So obviously you seem most comfortable in war, you didn't even know what we were fighting for, or what we were fighting against."

John thought about it for a second, "War is my life."

"I see."

Neither of them said anything for a while and then the Commander asked, "You don't have to answer this, but, how did you become a Spartan?"

John looked away for a moment, recalling the moments on the operating table, where sterilized needles bored their way into his flesh causing pain to flare all over his body. They made his skeleton invincible, his reflexes super human, and his body grow to huge heights. This was one of the few memories that actually made him feel unpleasant, but he was strong and answered the Commander, "I was chosen and they put me through special training. I was given chemicals that augmented my body to make it more combat prone. They gave me the armor when I graduated. And they had me fight the Covenant on numerous missions. Now that that's over, I'm not going to let it go to misuse. I give you my aid, and you give me a purpose."

Seems like a fair trade."

The Commander smiled, "Well then, I thank you John, for your enthusiasm."

"Just doing my job."

"Alright," said Shepard, "I'll talk to you later."

"Yes, sir," said John as Shepard walked out of the room.

* * *

><p>John heard that soon they would be making a drop to cure the Krogan Genophage and hopefully move on with the war effort. From what he had seen of the Reapers on Utukku, he knew this would be more akin to fighting the Flood. Zombie shock troops required no supply lines, did not retreat, had no fear, no morale, and had no pity. They were easier to pull the trigger on but harder to continuously fight them. But John would be ready. He always was.<p>

One day he went down to the armory, and saw that on a workbench, his armor had been taken out of its case, and laid out. John had a problem with anybody who would be touching his armor, and saw that the Salarian who they had picked up on the Sur'kesh mission, was poking the armor with strange instruments and doing scans with his omni-tool.

"Hey!" said John gruffly.

"Ah. John Spartan. Know what this looks like. Got permission from Shepard. Scanning experimental Armor systems. Impressed with findings. Must say, quite a discovery," said Mordin happily, with scientific interest. The Salarian had many wrinkles on his face, which denoted his age of almost forty years.

Getting permission from the commander gave John no option to stop the strange alien from touching it, but he decided to stay and watch anyway.

"What exactly are you doing?" John asked with annoyance.

"Looking for ways to adapt tech to STG armor models. Would save lives on the fronts. Regardless of Salarian choice in war, STG pledged to help human race fight Reapers on Earth."

"I see. I suppose that is good."

"Yes, indeed. Not scanning armor for nefarious purposes, neither trying to sabotage, merely studying. Heard you are ex-universal. Strange but not possible, if you would be so kind, explain how that happened?"

John found it odd that the alien was very accepting of such a thing but instead just said, "There was a random slipspace rupture in space, my ship flew into it and sent me here."

"Slipspace?"

"Yeah, I heard something that you guys don't have that here."

"Is that a method of interstellar travel?"

"Yes."

"Can you explain how it works?"

John didn't know how actually. He was sure Cortana could though, "Obviously you have the Commander's trust. Why don't you just talk to my AI."

"Personal AI? Very interesting. Will do that. My thanks for not being suspicious of me."

"I trust the Commander. If he says you are good, you are good."

"Yes, the Commander, good man, a little idealistic."

That interested Chief, so he asked, "How so?"

"Determined to save everyone, believes not so much in the 'greater good' but right thing, every time. Humans might say, self righteous."

"Ah."

"Yes. But Shepard only hope to stop Reapers. And to save Krogan."

John said nothing to that, and merely gave a curt nod and a goodbye and left the Scientist to his work.

21. Tuchanka Part 1

Wow. twenty chapters. Didn't think I'd get this far.

Enjoy! ~ Gehenna

* * *

><p>Brothers in Steel Chapter 20: Tuchanka Part 1<p>

As if by some weird crux of fate, John had returned to where he had arrived in this universe. It was a little funny, because Eve, the female Krogan, after learning of the story of John from Wrex, came to him before their departure to the planet. She said, "I believe that it was destiny that you arrived on Tuchanka. I believe that some force wanted you to aid us. Take this," she gave him a small amulet, "as a token of appreciation. You could have landed on any planet, or anywhere, but fate brought you to Tuchnanka. And obviously you are not finished yet."

Although John was no superstitious, her words did seem to ring true in a certain sense. Tuchanka was vital to the war. The war that he was now involved in.

The mission was simple, although the Commander had told him that things had gotten complicated; a Reaper, referred to as a "Destroyer"

had parked in front of the facility in which the cure for the genophage would be implemented.

John was shown a picture of it, and saw its immediate resemblance to a scarab.

"We've all run the sims," Sergeant Avery Johnson had said during the battle of New Mombasa, "They're tough, but they ain't invincible."

John hoped it applied to the Reaper Destroyer.

The team, consisting of Wrex, Shepard, John, Eve, Mordin and Garrus, were all uncomfortably squeezed into the tiny shuttle. Wrex paced around, taking away even more room.

"I've ordered the clans to assemble at the Hollows," said Wrex, "Its our sacred meeting grounds. We'll land there and then take an armored convoy against the Reaper."

Cortana asked for John, who was thinking the same thing, "How are tanks going to take out an enemy of that size?"

"Well," said Shepard, "its more of a distraction to get Mordin to the tower, and implement the Cure. We don't necessarily have to destroy the Reaper."

"Indeed, we also have air support," continued Wrex, "And Thanix missiles can do damage, if you hit the weak spot on the central firing mechanism."

Not much of a chance, thought John to himself.

"This will be the defining moment of Krogan History," said Wrex proudly.

Mordin lectured in response, "Krogan history filled with defining moments. Mostly bloody, hope this one is better."

There was a silence, until Eve remarked, "Commander, you seem troubled, something on your mind?"

"I got a message-," he began , until the ship lurched, and they all shook around.

"Wrex!" said a voice, similar to Wrex's but with a tone of annoyance and bitterness, opposite of Wrex's powerful inspiring voice. "Its Wreav. The Reapers are already at the Hollows. Come out with guns blazing."

"Trouble." Was all John remarked.

Everybody got up and readied weapons. The shuttle landed, sending up a cloud of dust off the aged stone. The shuttle's door opened, and a surprised Husk yelled out. Wrex shot a blast from his Eviscerator Shotgun. The Husk's face was blown off and it collapsed to the ground.

Wrex jumped off the shuttle and said, "Keep them away from the Female! I'll go sort out what's happening with the other

clans."

John jumped out. The hallows was a wide circular arena, with dilapidated sandstone walls and polygons sticking up out the ground. Across the room was a broken wall, with structural supports sticking out like bones sticking out of a carcass.

Three husks charged at John, one of them grabbing onto his arm.

He gave it a mighty smack, breaking its jaw, and quickly shot a round from his claymore into the trio, killing them all at once. He reloaded, and helped Garrus fight off a few others coming up the stairs.

John saw Shepard use a sniper rifle to take off a Husk clinging to a Krogan. Shepard took out his own omni blade and stabbed it through the chest of a husk, and then flung the husk over to the edge of an abyss.

The battle was quickly over, and Wrex appeared once again, with a few Krogan behind him. The Krogan were dressed in Battle armor, with proud and dominant looks on their faces. But then another group of Krogan appeared, looking like they wanted a fight.

"They'll sing Battle songs about this someday!" yelled Wrex as he came down the stairs, a shotgun in his hands.

"Reaper blood has finally soaked our soil."

Roars of approval sounded from Krogan above. John looked up and saw many more Krogan, gathering around the multiple levels of the Hollows.

"We have to get to the Shroud," said Shepard urgently, "The Airstrike is under way."

"Female safe, Shepard," said Mordin, just arriving from the shuttle, "Vitals are strong."

"What's a Salarian doing here?" an angry voice said. This was the Krogan that had spoke to them while in the shuttle. He looked very similar to Wrex, only a slight bit smaller, and his face a bit more rough and worn. "Nobody said anything about this!"

"Who are these Krogan?" asked John.

"I am Urdnot Wreav, humans, andâ€|turian," he said, regarding Garrus who merely coughed in awkwardness. Turians and Krogan did not regard each other well.

"Brood brotherâ€|" continued Wreav, "To our illustrious leader."

A bunch of Krogan supporting Wrex growled in anger and displeasure. John hoped this could be resolved. Fast.

Wrex said, "Wreav and I share the same mother, and nothing else."

"For which I'm thankful!" yelled Wreav, "I remember what it means to be true Krogan! We flay our enemies alive and drown them in a geyser

of their own blood. We do not invite them in our home."

"The Salarian's not your enemy," Shepard explained, "He's here to cure the genophage."

Wreav moved forward, as if he wanted to attack and said, "His Kind gave us the Genophage! Why should we trust him?"

Wrex responded by head butting Wreav in the face with his thick, bony headcrest.

Krogan on each side became angry, inflamed by the rising passions of the two Krogan brothers. Some took out their shotguns, as did Wreav, but then a voice, clear and demanding sounded out from above, "ENOUGH!"

It was the female Krogan.

"You can stay here," she began, "And let old wounds fester as Krogan have always done. Or you can fight the enemy that you were born to destroy, and win a new future for our children. I choose to fight."

John rarely felt admiration from speeches, he had heard too many, but this one rang true to him.

"Who will join me?"

Shepard said, "I will."

John said, "I will."

Garrus said, "Sure, why the hell not?"

"And so will I," Wrex affirmed, "Now hold your heads high like true Krogan. There's a Reaper that needs killing!"

All the Krogan from both sides growled in anticipation, ready for an upcoming challenge.

With that, they got into the trucks.

* * *

><p>The trucks were like those that John had ridden in on his first visit to Tuchanka. It was not a very comfortable ride; the truck continuously bumped and shook due to the ground of Tuchanka being mostly composed of rubble and sinkholes.<p>

While in the cramped car, Shepard revealed something. He said, "The Salarian Dalatrass tried to cut a deal with me."

"What kind of deal?" asked Wrex.

"She said they sabotaged the Shroud years ago. The cure won't work until we fix it."

"And she thought we wouldn't know better?" said Wrex, incredulous.

"Correctly," Mordin said, "Would likely have fooled tests. But, Familiar with STG work. Can adjust. Did not come all this way for nothing."

"You spared our race another genocide Commander," said the Female Krogan.

"I told you we could count on him."

The truck started to slow down, and Wrex got up and said, "Why are we stopping?"

Shepard and Garrus got out of the truck. Shepard told John to stay in the truck, just in case there was trouble.

A few minutes later, John heard noises of battle. The airstrike must have come early.

Then a huge explosions sounded and the truck rumbled for a moment. Shepard's voice came on the com, "Wrex! Get the female out of here! Go!"

Wrex got on the controls of the car and quickly dashed out of there. John said, "What just happened, why are we leaving them behind."

"The Reaper was too much for the Turians, we got to move now."

John looked at the rearview mirrors and saw that many trucks had been tossed about like nothing, and were either smoking, or merely flipped over, their drivers and Krogan trapped.

Things just got a whole lot more complicated.

22. Tuchanka Part 2

****Brothers in Steel Part 21: Tuchanka Part 2****

* * *

><p>The truck was violently thrashing about as it tried to escape away from the battle.<p>

The female Krogan was clutching tightly to her seat, and John was doing his best to keep balanced with each shake. Mordin had moved up to the front seat to aid Wrex in driving.

"Wrex, are you receiving this?" asked Shepard over the Comm, "is everybody ok?"

Wrex sounded out loud and clear from atop his driver's seat, "Just scratches, nothing the Salarian can't patch up. Wrex's truck made it too."

"The Turians had to call off the airstrike. We'll have to form a new plan to deal with the Reaper."

Wrex made a sharp turn that jolted Chief forward and caused Cortana to curse, "First we'll have to find you. Where did you end

up?"

"Underground," answered Shepard, "In ruins of some kind."

At that point Eve gave her commentary, "Commander, that's the city of the ancients."

"Um, How do we get out?"

"No maps exist, its been abandoned for thousands of years."

"Terrific," said John.

Wrex didn't seem dismayed, "You're a trailblazer Shepard. Get through there, and we'll find a place to meet up."

Wrex drove the Truck into smoother surface, moving into an area of worn, dilapidated buildings made of stone. Though John couldn't see that. Eventually, he heard Mordin ask where they were.

"Must be the top side of the City of Ancients," said Wrex with a shrug, "If Shepard comes out it will be around here somewhere."

"And if he doesn't..." began Cortana, before John shushed her.

"Did you feel a tremor?" asked Shepard.

"Not up here," said Wrex, "Must be something down there."

"Commander, it is said that this city is where Kalros the mother of all Thresher Maws lives, and that this is her lair."

"What's a Thresher Maw?" asked John.

"Its like a worm," said the Female Krogan in a teacher-like tone, "But it spits acid and grows to enormous sizes. Their embryos travel across space to numerous worlds after being sent out from, according to legend, Kalros."

"That sounds like a major galactic problem," said Cortana in an incredulous tone. "And nobody has done anything about it?"

The female Krogan shook her head.

Cortana sighed in derision.

Suddenly, John heard Wrex yell, "Incoming fire!"

A blaze of red and orange flared up above them. John asked, "What was that?"

"Looks like the Reapers have been shipping out Rachni troops already," said Wrex, "I hope Shepard doesn't run into any of those in the dark, in close enclosed places."

A few minutes later, they heard Shepard on the radio, as Wrex did a drift, "Wrex, we got Rachni down here. A Dead one."

"Yeah, I know, a few just attacked us. All that matters is getting to that Shroud. Find us, fast."

A few minutes passed as they drove around the outskirts of the ruined city. On the radio John could hear the sound of fighting between Shepard and Garrus against Reaper forces in the city. His hand balled up into a fist, itching for a fight, worried that the two of them wouldn't be able to make it. Eventually Wrex let them know that he could see Shepard approaching a bridge.

"Wait there..." began Wrex, "I'll come pick you up, Wait! Kalros!"

"What?" blurted out Chief, as he felt a slight rumble underneath his feet, and then a roar sounded out from behind the truck. The truck hit a bump that knocked John to his feet, and pushed the Female Krogan on her side.

"Maw's Territorial Instinct confirmed!" yelled out Mordin.

"John!" shouted Wrex from above, "Get on the back gun and distract that bastard while I try to meet up with Shepard."

John nodded and helped the female Krogan up. Then he scrambled up the ladder leading up to the back gun of the truck. It didn't take too long for John to figure out how to use, and he got in the seat to get a better view of what was chasing them.

A huge crested object, like a moving mountain, was chasing them through sand and rubble, kicking up dust as it went, and following them with every precise movement. John quickly got into firing mode and began pouring rounds at the creature, to little avail though. The creature's hide was too thick for whatever John was firing at it.

"Hurry up, Wreav," John heard Wrex say. The other truck was even closer to the Maw, and John had to pause his firing as to not hit their allies. Wrex's truck would occasionally get a tap from the Maw and get nuzzled over to the side, but managed to keep far enough away from it to not get eaten.

"I can almost feel the damn thing's breath," complained Wreav over the Comm.

John heard the creature roar again but they managed to out drift it, and the top of its crest swam underneath the sands. "Its gone," said John, relaxing his fingers off the trigger.

"We've almost lost Kalros," said Wrex to Shepard, "Stay where you are and we'll pick you up."

"We're just around the corner," explained Shepard, "Waiting."

John remained in his seat as the truck pulled up.

"Wreav," commanded Wrex, "Keep an eye on that Maw. I don't want it sneaking up on us."

The other Truck came to a halt a few paces behind them.

The door of the Truck creaked open and in came Shepard and Garrus, looking not too worse for wear. A thick rumble came from behind the trucks, shaking the inside of their own. John put his hands on the triggers again, just as Kalros's huge silhouette rushed by them on their left side. John didn't waste the ammunition, and the truck started to move forward. John watched as Wreav's truck was overtaken by the Maw and dragged below the sands in an explosion of dust and grit. And then all of a sudden, the shaking stopped.

There was a pause of silence, then the Female Krogan asked, "What about Wreav?"

"No way he survived that," answered Wrex, "And he was a pain in the ass anyway."

John laughed at that. Cortana said, "Good to know our Allies favor eachother."

"Now lets get on with it. We still got a Reaper waiting for us," said Wrex as they sped off towards the Shroud.

23. Tuchanka Part 3

****Author's Note-** Man it feels good to be working on this fic again. ~ Gehenna******

****Brothers In Steel Part 22: Tuchanka Part 3****

* * *

><p>The Reaper was very...arachnid in its design. It swayed back and forth slowly in front of the shroud, a tall spire like building that emitted a field of blue-green light from its peak. The Reaper would occasionally blare out a horn-like sound. John and Garrus slid out of the truck and stood to look at it. John did not seem to be fazed by it; he had fought things of similar size. Garrus however seemed a little skeptical of their success.<p>

"I know we've beaten the odds before, Shepard," Garrus lamented, "But getting to that tower. I don't know."

Wrex, the Female Krogan and Mordin walked up besides them to also gaze at the Reaper. John said as cheerfully as he could manage, "That's not too bad. That thing couldn't precisely hit targets as small as us. It could stomp us though."

"We're curing the Genophage no matter what it takes," said Wrex defiantly, "Everything my people will ever depend on it."

"Then I hope this idea of yours was a good one," said Shepard, joining them.

"It's her idea, actually," said Wrex, pointing to the Female Krogan.

"Kalros," she explained, "We summon her to the Reaper."

"How?" asked John.

"The tower was built in an arena devoted to Kalros' glory. The Salarians thought she would scare away any intruders."

"Strategy seems to have worked," said Mordin.

"There are two Maw Hammers there, the largest in existence. If you can activate them, Kalros will come. That should distract the Reaper."

"Laboratory nearby, can finish synthesizing cure in there."

"That's convenient," said Cortana.

"Yeah, I wonder if the lab is even usable after a thousand years," said John.

"No time to worry about that," declared Mordin, "Mission too important."

"This is the only way to get the cure to the Shroud," said Wrex.

"Lets all make sure we all get out of here alive. We're going to have one hell of a story to tell," said Shepard proudly.

They began to walk but Wrex halted them, "Wait! No matter what happens, I want you to know," he said to Shepard, "That you've been a champion of the Krogan people, a friend to clan Urdnot, and a brother to me. To every Krogan born after this day, the name 'Shepard' will mean 'hero!'"

Shepard and Wrex did a quick handshake and Wrex finished his speech, "Now lets show them why!"

"Hell yeah!" said Garrus.

John said nothing, having nothing to contribute.

A _skree_! Noise sounded out from behind them. Slowly crawling up from a ditch in the ground, a group of bulbous Rachni soldiers were charging towards them, ready to fire.

"I'll take care of them!" yelled Wrex, "Get to the Shroud!"

Wrex charged at them with primal fury, shooting a blast from his Claymore shotgun and rupturing the sac of one of the Rachni in front with a messy explosion. Then he charged without reloading into the next one, shoving it over on its back, legs flailing about. He roared and said, "I am Urdnot Wrex! And this is My Planet!"

* * *

><p>John was taking point on the bridge when he saw the laser.<p>

"Look out!" yelled Shepard as the red beam scored the bridge. John managed to back away in time not to get fried, but an explosion of dust and rubble kicked up into his visor and clouded his vision, and he rolled onto the ground. The rubble slid over him and he had to kick and claw his way out.

"Are you ok?" asked Garrus. John nodded, and heard the blare of the Reaper.

A long pathway of fallen statues and rubble was in their way and the Reaper was in front of them, its laser shining with radiant red light, as it prepared for another attack. They quickly scurried forward to get to cover. The beam shot again overhead and hit the ground behind John, and he could feel the radiation, his shields sizzling in reaction, lowering in power.

John quickly slid into cover, and ducked down, as the laser dissipated. Then he jumped over the fall cover, smelling the odor of ozone and smoke behind him.

"Just keep moving!" yelled Shepard. Another blast hit a statue in front of the Commander, blowing it into huge chunks of stone, landing all about the battlefield.

"Stick to cover!" yelled Shepard again. Garrus answered him with a grunt and said, "I'm not sure cover's going to work."

"We need to get faster," said John, and he began to speed up, as the Turian fighters returned overhead and began to shoot at the Reaper's center eye. The Reaper closed its armor plates over its eye laser and roared in defiance.

"Commander, this is Artimec Wing. We'll give the Reaper something else to shoot out."

"Now that's bravery," said Cortana.

John continued to run, until he got underneath the Reaper. A blazing ball fell to his right into the sand erupted up flame and grit into the air around him. His shields flared up and he realized that whatever had been shot out was a hostile; it was hard to describe. Its head reminded John of Garrus, so it must have been a turian, but it looked like it had been welded onto something else, with a huge crab-like appendage in place of normal arms.

"What the hell?" asked John to himself as he quickly dodged a swipe from the creature, who roared in anger.

"Get to the left Maw Hammer, John!" yelled Shepard, as more of the creatures were shot out from the Reaper. The dust was growing so thick John was losing visibility. He ran through the cloud and around an enemy, up a flight of stairs. The creatures weren't very agile, so they slowly plodded after him. John ran over to the left Maw hammer, and saw Garrus running after him, his assault rifle clinging close to his chest.

John pressed the only button available. The pedestal it had rested on sunk back into the ground, and John heard the roar of one of the Reaper creatures. He shot it full force in the head with his shotgun, eviscerating it and causing the creature to slump over dead.

"Got the other one!" yelled Shepard, and a humongous gong sounded out.

John ran over to Shepard and Garrus. Shepard quickly ordered them,

"Get back to the truck, I'll handle the cure, go!"

"Sir..." began John.

"That's an order!"

John didn't need telling twice. He would have preferred to stay instead of run, but orders were orders, and the Reaper was indeed distracted now.

John and Garrus ran without looking behind them, and they heard the noise of a gigantic screech and the roar of the Reaper behind them. The ground shook with tremors, and Garrus fell to one knee, as a red laser beam zoomed over head. John helped Garrus up and they continued running away from the arena, towards the truck.

John looked behind himself, when he heard the sound of screeching metal. The last thing he saw of the Reaper was it being dragged down underground, the Thresher Maw coiled around its titanic Arachnid body, a turn up of dust and sand thrown about wildly.

"Impressive," said John, admiring nature's handiwork.

"Lets get out of here!" said Cortana. But it wasn't Cortana. Her voice had flared up, become much shriller, almost as if two voices had spoken.

"What just happened?" asked John, concerned.

"I'm fine, but we need to get to the truck!"

John kept running. When he finally got the truck, Wrex and the Female Krogan were waiting for them. A brown snow was starting to fall around them. A brown-white light was emanating from the Stroud, and all the Krogan had gathered around, looking wide-eyed in joy and disbelief.

"Did it work?" asked John, as he looked to the sky, "Is that what the cure looks like?"

"No," answered the Female Krogan, "That is what Rebirth looks like."

24. Promotion

****Brothers In Steel Part 23: Promotion****

****Author's Note: Yay for Filler Chapters****

* * *

><p>John's boots thudded with each step as he entered the AI core. He took out Cortana's chip from his pocket and put it inside the adapter, and then said grimly as she appeared in front of him, "We need to talk."<p>

"About what?," she tried to say as innocently as possible.

"You know what. On Tuchanka. Your voice. It changed, split. I'm no

scientist but that's a sign of something bad."

Cortana sighed and said, "Look Chief, I didn't want to talk about it..."

"You should have." he stated simply.

"The operational average for an AI of my class is seven years. I was put into commission eight years ago."

"Eight years..." John pondered on that. Cortana was getting old for an Artificial Construct.

"Yes. And so it would appear as if I'm finally on my way to Rampancy. It happened the other day as well. All my files flashed green, well not that you would have seen them, but if you could have that's the color they would have BEEN." her voice cracked and split at the end of that.

"Its going to get worse," said John, "There has to be a way to fix it though. This universe has more advanced Artificial Intelligence technology than we do...did. Hell, EDI controls the ship AND walks around in a robot body. There's got to be somebody that can fix you."

"Possibly. I remember EDI remarking that my tech is 2093-level. So its possible someone might have the know how."

"I'll ask Liara, what she knows. She's...a scientist."

"Alright Chief, but promise me something."

John turned around to face his partner, "What?"

"If I go really insane. Don't waste time. Just pull the plug."

John frowned and said nothing. Cortana badgered him again and said, "John, promise."

"Alright, I promise."

* * *

><p>John was on his way to Liara's when he heard his name being called to the CIC over the intercom.<p>

He made his way up there and Samantha Traynor told him that the Commander wanted to see him in his room again.

"Now what?" grumbled John. The last time he had been called up , it was to be reprimanded for "foolhardy" actions. Now he was being called again. He didn't remember doing anything "foolhardy" on Tuchanka, but he marched up all the same.

The Commander was standing in front of his fish tank watching his fish. The colorful creatures swam pleasantly around in their tank, and at first Shepard didn't notice John walk into the room.

"John, good to see you," turning to face John while leaning forwards against the fish tank.

John saluted and said, "You wanted to see me sir?"

"Of course. John its come to my attention that you've proven yourself an invaluable asset."

"Thank you sir."

"So I've decided I'm going to promote you."

That was surprising, but John showed no change of emotion. He merely said, "What would the next rank be, Sir?"

"Traditionally, you would just be bumped up to 2nd Lieutenant, and sent off to Officer's school in Brazil. In fact that's where I trained, when I wanted to become an N1. But these are dire circumstances. So I've decided to bump you up higher and be my 1st Lieutenant."

That was really surprising, "I, thank you sir."

"Not going to ask why?"

"Its obvious sir. You need more officers for the war."

"Yes, but besides James you are the only actual Navy personnel for combat. James, off the record, wouldn't be a very good leader. Until Major Alenko, you'll meet him soon enough, is out of hospitalization and ready to get back into the fight, I need someone ready to take over the ship for me in case something happens. On all four of the missions you've been on, you've shown good aptitude and tactical prowess. You also have discipline. I don't care if we just literally found you floating around in space. You have the tools and the talent, and that's all I care about to win this war."

"Yes, sir," replied John proudly, "I won't let you down."

"Good," said Shepard, "And one more thing."

"Sir?"

"I'm going to give you access to my private armory. There are some rare weapons in there, you may want to check out on the way back to the Citadel."

"Thank you Sir, I will do that. Take a look at them, I mean."

"Good, dismissed John."

John turned around and left the room, smiling to himself. Already an officer and it hadn't even been a month. Things were looking good.

* * *

><p>John walked into Liara's room. She was working at some terminal, fingers clacking away at the keyboard, not noticing John walking. Glyph alerted her and Liara hurriedly got up from what she was doing and said, "John. This was unexpected. How can I help you?"<p>

"I need information, scientific information. And you seemed like the

best place to start looking."

"What do you need information on," she said curiously. She beckoned him to take a seat on the bed while stood.

"Are you familiar with the term, 'Rampant AI'?"

"Hmmm..." said Liara, "I may have come across it once or twice in Graduate school, but Artificial Intelligence is not my field of expertise."

"And that is?"

"Ancient Alien Civilizations. Xeno Archaeology to be precise. I used to spend most of my time at Prothean dig sites. But explain to me more about this Rampant AI."

"Where I come from, AI like Cortana, you know her right?"

"We've not been formally introduced, but I know who she is."

"Where I come from, AI like Cortana, smart ones, eventually go insane. I don't really know how it works, all I know is that they start to become dangerous, insane even. After their lifespan, they usually are put out of commission, but..."

"You don't want that to happen to Cortana?"

"No."

Liara thought for about a minute and then said "Alright Chief. I don't have any real firsthand knowledge on this, but its possible I might be able to get some old contacts together and dig up some information. I'll let you know what I find." She put a hand on John's shoulder, and he tensed up. "I'll help you in whatever way I can."

John was grateful and said, "Thanks Liara. I didn't really know where else to go with this."

"No problem, we're teammates."

"Yeah, teammates."

25. Coup Part 1

****Brothers In Steel Chapter 24: Coup Part 1****

* * *

><p>"What exactly have you brought me here, Shay?" asked Henry Lawson, annoyed. Many busy projects involving the Reaper Husks needed to be done today, and he didn't have time for petty intrusions. Henry Lawson was a driven man, with graying hair, furrowed brows, and a slim figure. His obsession was with his legacy, and the experiments he was conducting here were essential to that. What Shay had brought him didn't seem at all useful, not at first glance.<p>

"Sir, this is an unidentified species that we found on Tuchanka.

There were no other samples of it, so we had to keep great care to keep it alive," explained Shay, as the two of them walked over to reinforced pen, "Release the specimen!"

A Cerberus soldier up in the command booth pressed a red button to raise down a steel door. At first nothing happened, but then Lawson watched in astonishment as a strange shape began to form out of the darkness, and then a grotesque being appeared, slumping over and walking with a limp.

Its flesh was green-gray and cracked, with many knobby growths placed all over its body. If there had ever been a head it was a gone, covered in a fleshy sac that pulsed with strange energy, tentacle like growths erupting from open sores that leaked white pus on the body. It growled a little bit and stumbled over to the glass wall, bumping into it. This didn't break its resolve though, and it kept walking into the glass wall. One of its arms had dislocated and swung feebly, limply swaying with each attack.

"This was one of my Science officers. Peter Wesley. He was attacked by smaller specimen, killed and his body transformed into this. The smaller specimen rooted into his body, and now seems to have created a sac around the upper part of his body. It is quite hostile, trying to take it as a specimen cost me two men, one of them also turning into one of these things. That was quite a scare, but they are vulnerable to mass accelerator rounds, if you pour enough into them. Eventually we restrained this one and shipped him here."

Lawson was stunned and asked, "The original specimen possessed its host's body you say?"

"Yes," answered Shay, "and now controls it in puppet like fashion"

The creature kept walking into the glass and Lawson noted, "It seems to have a single minded intent of killing us."

"I don't think its that intelligent, hold on what's this?"

The upper sac of the creature ruptured, and a loud pop occurred, pieces of green-gray refuse being tossed into up into the air. Small, balloon like animals with tentacles for movement came out, five in all, landing on the ground delicately and scurrying all over the walls of the pen.

"It just...just...multiplied," said Lawson, astonished.

"It would appear as if we've found out how they reproduce."

"No doubt." Lawson began to think. "The Illusive Man could make use of this, but we have no way to control them. Not yet anyway. I don't think we should dedicate too many research expenses to this, however, with a breakthrough in Husk control on the way. However, we could benefit from some more tests. Shay."

"Yes sir?"

"Round up a few undesirables from the camp. We'll throw them in this pen, and see if we can create some more of these things. But we need to take caution. They don't look friendly, and we don't need this

getting out of hand. Just push some people into the pit, I'm sure that will be safe..."

* * *

><p>"What's the matter?" asked John to Liara as she passed him by on the crew deck, looking a little bit frazzled.<p>

"Shepard's called me up, apparently there's a situation."

John decided to follow with, and the two took the elevator to the CIC, then walked to the War Room to meet with Shepard. Shepard was looking at a diagram of the Citadel, and he said to them, "Liara, Lieutenant. We've got a situation on the Citadel. Cerberus has taken it."

"How?" asked John. Cerberus was raiding frigates and attacking science bases, but they didn't seem big enough to take on the heart of galactic government.

"No idea, they apparently came out of nowhere, all we got as warning was a message from the C-Sec Commander, Commander Bailey. They've taken the C-Sec headquarters, and if they continue to hold it, and manage to kill off the Council, they'll have control of the station. We can't let that happen. Liara, I'm going to need you on this one. Ever since Grissom Academy, you're the only defense we have against Guardians."

"Right," nodded Liara.

"You want me to come too?" asked John.

"You've fought Cerberus before, so you'll be a good choice. Just bring along Disruptor Rounds in case we run into some heavily shielded enemies, like those Atlas Mechs. We wouldn't want you doing anything foolhardy again, would we?" Even now, Shepard retained a small amount of humor. John had to admire that.

The Normandy's shuttle took them to the Citadel. The shuttle's "window" gave them a look of the situation. All over the Presidium a mass firefight was raging between C-sec and Cerberus, and Cerberus was obviously gaining the upper hand. Explosions had racked the shopping area John had been to once, and flaming hover cars reduced to slag now laid all over the area, melting. Civilians were running away in the cross-fire, some being mowed down by mass accelerator fire.

Cortez steered the shuttle to the C-Sec hangar, gliding it down low. Even in the hangar, the fight was still going. A group of Turians had the right flank and were being overridden by a large number of Cerberus soldiers. Pools of purple blood had accumulated on the slick chrome floors of C-Sec's front courtyard.

"Okay people, we're coming in hot," commanded Shepard, "Get to Cover."

John and Liara took opposite flanks and John moved around the west side, taking out his new M-11 Wraith Shotgun and blasted the head of an unlucky Cerberus trooper to a bloody pulp. John quickly got into cover as their fire shifted onto him, plinking on the other side.

John switched weapons to his Avenger and started laying down suppressing fire for the Commander, while Liara shot out a ball of blue-purple Biotic energy that picked up some unshielded enemies into the air before exploding and hurling them to the wall. The impact killed them.

"Looks like she can handle herself," said Cortana, "I can see why you've gotten friendly with her."

John said nothing, and focused on the battle, moving up until all three of them overran the last of the Cerberus defenders. Smoke lay over the battlefield, and a fire blazed away in the corner of the room. A wounded old man lay in a pool of mixed Turian and human blood, coughing.

"We got wounded here," said John.

"Shepard," the man said, "I saw those Cerberus troops on you. Thought you were done for."

"Isn't the Commander credited for having killed a Reaper?" said Cortana.

"Now's not the time," muttered John, silencing her.

"Bailey, what are you doing here?" asked Shepard.

"Getting my ass shot off, trying to retake Headquarters," the older man explained. The man had a flat top hair cut, a rough visage, and furrowed brows. "Cerberus took it in the first push. We got to kick them out of there. Everyone in C'-Sec's running blind without the network."

"Is this the situation everywhere?" asked Liara, "Are the councilors even still alive?"

John helped Bailey up, and he said, "They split up. I'll know more when I can get to a terminal."

"Can you get us in?"

"I'll get the door, if nobody stops me with a bullet this time."

Bailey managed to override the locking codes on the door and they entered. He got on the nearest terminal and said, "Here we go. C-Sec network access, courtesy of Cerberus. Cerberus has control of the main channels, but I can set up a new one. Without it, we have no plan and no chance. Hello..."

"What have you got?" said Shepard.

John walked over, his boots crunching on the broken glass.

"A warning from Councilor Valern. He's supposed to be here, meeting with the Executor. 'Be on guard, the likelihood of betrayal from within is high'. Not a lot else, but if he's inside..."

"Who is the betrayer?" wondered John.

"Usually when a Councilor meets with the Executor, they're going to persecute someone big. Maybe this person have Cerberus friends..."

"One Councilor with information is better than Zero. Where can I find him?"

"The Executor's office is defensible, he may have gone to ground when the shooting started," explained Bailey.

"I'm on it," said Shepard defiantly.

Bailey stopped them, "Just a sec...Now we can talk by omni-tool, go!"

With that, the three of them ran out of the room and deeper into C-Sec Headquarters.

26. Coup Part 2

****Brothers In Steel Part 25: Coup Part 2****

* * *

><p>After fighting through several groups of Cerberus cannon fodder, the team came up a flight of stairs and took cover behind an unlocked door. John and Shepard got into cover on each side of the door, while Liara opened it with her fist. Then Shepard went in first, John following behind. The room they entered was littered with dead Salarians and Humans in navy blue C-Sec uniforms, the smell of charred flesh poignant in the smoky air. Papers had been spread about on the floor, and an overturned desk had been smashed in on the left side of the room.<p>

"Bailey," said Shepard, "Looks like they got the Executor, and two Salarian bodyguards."

"Damn. All right keep searching. If you don't see the Councilor's body don't count him out yet."

John walked up to the window. Below was an office area, tables and chairs the only witness to the carnage earlier. John saw one of the windows move though and a shimmering of light. A Salarian in a blue hooded cloak, with light blue facial tattoos rose up from under the table.

"Commander," said John, "Is that him?"

"Found him, and he appears unharmed."

"Get him somewhere safe!" ordered Bailey.

John watched as a figure dropped down from the ceiling, landing right in front of the Councilor, who backed off in fear.

The Commander has his back turned. John saw an asian man, with strange goggles, wearing jet black armor that matched his ponytail, and carrying a sword.

John quickly shot the window with his Carnifex pistol and jumped down with a thump. Liara and Shepard followed, backing up John as the strange sword-wielding man kept the Councilor at bay with a yellow and purple light emitting from his hand. Whatever it was, it was going to put some really damage on the Councilor.

"Don't even think about it," warned Shepard, raising up his own pistol.

"Shepard!" hissed the Salarian Councilor, "He's going to kill us all."

"That remains to be seen."

"No! I mean Udina. He's staging a coup. He's got the other councilors now, going to hand them off to Cerberus."

John remembered the name "Udina", it might have been something he had read, but he couldn't place it.

"Three on one pal," said Shepard, "Its over."

"No," the sword-wielding man said cockily, "Now its fun."

John's fingers started to itch, wanting to shoot the bastard. A standoff lasted for a fews seconds that seemed like an hour, then the Salarian Councilor raised his hands and shimmering lights enveloped him, hiding his body. But the Cerberus swordsman was too fast and shot a bolt from his hand, creating a dark purple stain of blood that dripped onto the linoleum floor.

John didn't even need to react, he immediately started pumping rounds at the Assassin, whose shields ruptured, but managed to get to cover in time. John ran after him, his Spartan speed allowing him easily overtake the swordsman. The swordsman did a barrel roll and landed onto a flight of stairs below. John chased him and Cortana yelled, "He's running towards the edge!"

"I know." he said calmly and ran at the swordsman. The man managed to jump off the edge. John could hear Shepard yelling in the back but ignored him and jumped too.

For what it seemed, the hover car was not that far below.

Both of them were able to get up and stand, but John was slightly put off balance as the hover car started to take off. The swordsman got into a ready position, but John wasn't having any of it. He threw his pistol away and took out his assault rifle, firing shots at the swordsman.

Whoever was driving however, knew what to do and swerved at an angle to try and shake John off. John quickly pulled out his omni-blade and sunk it into the chassis of the hover car, hanging on for dear life as the scenery around him flashed by in blurs of white, blue and green. Sparks rained down from above.

The good news was at least the swordsman was thrown off as well, and was also clinging as well on his side. The car righted itself up and John had a more firm grip, allowing himself to pull up onto the car.

"Get in the cockpit, push the driver out and take over!" yelled Cortana.

"Easier said than done," retorted John, but he complied. With one punch of his Spartan fist he broke the glass. A woman was inside, dressed in a skin-tight black suit. And John got inside, pieces of glass streaming around him.

The woman tried to pull out a pistol, but John quickly back handed her and knocked her unconscious. Immediately the hover car began to lose altitude and careen at a diagonal descent.

John managed to unclip the woman's seatbelt, then lift her up over him, awkwardly shuffle into her seat, and then set her down on his side. Then just as he got done with that, the hover car crashed into a Presidium lake.

* * *

><p>Having armor that weighed half a ton was often a nuisance when it came to operating in water. After escaping the crashing hover car, John slowly sank to the bottom of the lake, his metal boots clanging against the lake bottom, which was not made up of any kind of silt or sand, just whatever material the entire Citadel was made of. Thankfully for John, there was a fifteen minute supply of oxygen in his suit, which would give him enough time to find a way out of the lake, hopefully.<p>

"Cortana," he said, "How do we get out of here?"

"I would assume there has to be some way out, maybe there's an area where you can rise above the water? Like a shore? I don't know, do you know if these things go swimming here?"

John had no answers so he said nothing. He continued to walk forward though, noticing that the water level was indeed growing shorter with each step.

Eventually, the water level became low enough that John's head rose over the top of the water line, at least putting his oxygen problems on hold. "Now lets get out of here," he said.

He walked along the edge of the lake until eventually he found a ledge low enough for him to climb up. He managed to pull himself up and mantle over the top, lying on the Citadel ground for a few seconds to recuperate. Then he got back out again and said, "Now we need to find that Swordsman. Otherwise this will have all been for nothing."

John only had one weapon left; his shotgun. He wasn't too far from where the C-Sec headquarters was. The area around him was quiet, there was nobody around, and there were no visible signs of battle.

A group of human C-Sec Officers were taking cover behind a parking lot of hover cars, when John walked near them. They looked at him with dumbstruck faces and asked, "Who are you?"

"Alliance. I was with Commander Shepard when we tried to retake C-Sec

headquarters. You wouldn't happened to see an Human Asian Male, carrying a sword around would you? I'm kind of trying to uh...apprehend him."

Their lead officer was still staring at John but managed to blurt out a comprehnsible answer, "Oh right. Yeah, we saw him. Took cover behind here because he joined up with a group of Cerberus soldiers too big for us to take on our own. Headed in that direction," the man pointed into what as far as John could tell, was north.

A beeping noise sounded out from John's omni-tool and he picked it up. It was alerting him that he had over nine missed calls, and now a new one. John picked it up and said, "Lieutenant Spartan reporting."

It was Shepard, and he didn't sound happy, "John where the hell are you?"

John put the omni-tool down and asked the Turians, "Where are we?"

"Shalmar plaza," they answered him, and John told Shepard.

"Oh," said Shepard, calming down considerably, "That makes you right beneath us. Where's Kai Leng? We got the Council to safety, did you kill him?"

"No sir," said John, wishing he had gotten the chance.

"Then I guess you did the right thing, jumping after Leng. C-Sec took back their headquarters, we got to the Council before Cerberus did, and took care of Udina. Most of Cerberus is on the run now, so I'm guessing that's what happened to Kai Leng."

"That's it?" asked Cortana, "Seems too easy."

"Well this is the Citadel," said John, "There was bound to be more C-Sec all over the 'wings'. Cerberus would have complete control if they had the Presidium, and they don't so, I guess that means we won."

The C-Sec officers looked ecstatic, and started to cheer.

"Where should I RV with you guys?" asked John.

"Take the elevator upstairs, then we'll meet up at the landing pad, and take a shuttle back to the Normandy."

"Looks like we saved the day again, Chief," said Cortana proudly.

"Looks like it," said John.

And with that, John led the C-Sec officers to the elevator in triumph.

27. Apartment

****Brothers In Steel Part 26: Apartment****

* * *

><p>"The Asari councilor will see you now Mr. Spartan," said the Asari secretary.<p>

"Oh, thanks." John nodded and went into the Asari Councillor's office. After the battle of the Citadel finished up, John and Garrus and Liara had helped out in the rebuilding of some of the wards, at the Citadel's behest, and had done a good job about it too. The Normandy was in dry-dock as Shepard had some last-minute business before they had to set out again the next day, along with the fact that the Normandy needed to restock on supplies. In the mean time, Shepard had given up a full report on the actions of him and his crew, and had mentioned John in his report. And now for some reason, the Asari Councilor had called him up to speak with him. There was no way to refuse a Councilor, and John didn't really have anything better to do anyway other than swig drinks with James or help Garrus at the refugee camps again.

The Asari councilor looked like most Asari, a revelation that John kept to himself as not to appear racist. The blue-skinned woman kind of reminded him of a mom, a mom with a much slimmer figure though. She wore an orange dress with a white middle, and had black cuffs around her wrists. She shook his hand with her own, which felt altogether more firm than John had suspected. "Good to meet you, Mr. Spartan. I was told a lot of you by Commander Spartan. You and Miss T'soni were instrumental in saving our lives."

"Its all part of the job, but you are welcome," answered John courteously.

"Commander Shepard, as you probably know already, saved our lives three years ago at the first Battle of the Citadel, for that we have given him a broad amount of trust, and restored his Spectre status. The Council rewards those that honor it. So I, and the Council, have decided to grant you your own personal apartment on the Presidium, near Sector A slash B-Twenty-one z-forty-five x."

Surprised, John didn't know what to say. He had never been given his own house before, let alone owned one. His entire life had been spent on secret military bases, or in cryo-sleep, or going days without sleep, while Covenant plasma rained over head. "I, thank you Madame Councillor, but my place is on the Normandy."

"We are aware. You are welcome to use it whenever you come to the Citadel, and after the war if you want. Or you could rent it out, make some credits on the side. Whatever you do with it is yours, so long as you claim a hold to it. The War will end, or at least we have to think so that we don't just break down and give up."

"I understand that," said John, "I'll be sure to put it to use. Somehow."

"Good, I hope to hear more of your exploits, John," she said, signifying that the meeting was over.

* * *

><p>Apparently the apartment had been the property of a Volus

ambassador named Din Korlack who had gotten involved with Cerberus and may have been privy to information regarding the attempted coup. Shepard explained this to John, when John reported the news. The council wanted somebody to watch it, in case any mercs came looking for Din, not knowing he was now in a C-sec cell. Also, Shepard felt like John needed a permanent place of residence, explaining that there was no probable way that he could ever return home.<p>

"I've come to accept that," John had said simply, "We came here in a freak accident."

John's apartment was near the shopping district, and when John went to go see it with Liara, a group of Volus housecleaners had taken up shop, and were busy repairing and cleaning, because according to them, there had been a fight and the walls had been stained with merc blood.

"Got to love the neighborhood," remarked Liara with a chuckle.

"Hmm. We'll come back later."

"Come on, John, I know a good place to eat."

"Eat?"

"Don't tell me you don't eat?"

In truth, John had been eating military rations his entire life, and they usually lacked for flavor. This was now the first time John would ever be going to a restaurant. Liara told him she was paying, even though he protested. However, she pointed out that none of the pay owed to him by the Alliance was bound to come until after the war, a big I.O.U., since the Reapers had pretty much leveled humanity's financial infrastructure. John had to accept that he was broke. He joked, "I guess I could have sold my armor. Cortana wouldn't have been happy about that. Good thing you guys found us."

They took a seat down and John scrolled through the menu. There was a variety of things John had never tried and he was overwhelmed. Liara noticed and said, "Are you able to decide what you want John?"

"Uhh...I don't even know what half these things taste like."

"Never had steak? Never had pasta? Never had...well I guess they never had Giant Skald filet wherever you came from, because Skald fish would never have existed, but regardless."

"The best meal I ever had was on Christmas, on Reach, that's the uh...planet I grew up on. We ate a real ham every year. Do you think they have that?"

Liara scrolled down the list of entrees and said, "No, sorry. But I think its good that you are forced to try something new."

"New can be dangerous, unfriendly."

"That's a fifty, fifty chance. New experiences, they help you grow, at least that's what I believe. Somewhat."

John saw the logic in that and nodded, "Alright then, you order for me."

"Are you sure," said Liara coyly, "What if I choose something that looks utterly disgusting?"

"I'll learn to adapt."

Liara ordered for them using the datapad, and a Salarian waiter came up to them and dropped their food. Liara had gotten some sort of fish meal, but she had gotten John what appeared to be a bunch of green colored noodles with vegetables and small, fried octopi.

"Are these what I think they are?"

"What do you think they are?"

"Noodles with octopus"

"Correct, its based on an old Asari recipe, but instead of traditional Thessian Mollusks, they had to settle with octopi from earth. I find it delightful. Give it a try."

The dish unsettled John's stomach a little, because it reminded him of the flood, in a weird, disturbing way. But he ate it anyway.

"So?" asked Liara.

"Salty."

"Good or bad?"

"Well its food."

"But do you enjoy it?"

John didn't know how to answer that.

"I...think I do."

"In time, you'll learn to like things just for the pleasure of them," said Liara hopefully, taking a sip of a light blue alcoholic drink.

"Maybe," was all he said, though in his mind he doubted it. Liara seemed to sense his doubts and did not press. John ate every single bite though, as he was not one to waste food.

After they were done, they walked back to John's new place. The Volus housekeepers were just about done. John found the Volus interesting; like him they lived most of their lives in suits, and seemed to bumble about due to their shape, like walking bowling balls.

"Can we come in now?" asked John.

The lead Volus wheezed, "Almost. We're trying to get rid of the stench."

"Stench of what?"

"Loosened Krogan Bowels."

"Oh."

Liara laughed, "I'm glad we ate lunch before we thought about that."

John was not amused.

Finally, they were allowed in and John got a view of the place. It was a lot more lavish than John expected. He was expecting a kind of one room slum, or maybe a one bedroom, one bathroom, but instead what he got was a two bedroom flat, the floors downed with brand-new carpet. There was a window on the side that gave a grand extensive view of the lake and even had a balcony.

"Pretty nice for a soldier," said Liara.

John was entranced, for the first time he had a place to call his own.

He walked around the empty house, devoid of all furnishings or wall coverings. The walls were white, and the kitchen and bathrooms were inlaid with linoleum tiles painted with ornamental geometric patterns.

John walked onto the balcony and leaned against the front rail, appreciating the beautiful view of the artificial lake. Liara came and stood next to him.

"Looks like you're set, once this war is over," said Liara.

"Yeah. Just need a bed. And maybe a place for Cortana to sleep."

"Maybe you can put her in an Extranet terminal. Might be a little weird for her though."

"Have you got any trails on how to fix her?"

"A few, but I need to get in touch with some contacts first. I'll let you know when I have some concrete solutions," she said firmly.

"Thanks, I appreciate it."

"No problem." For a few minutes, they stood in silence, then John said, "I never figured this would happen."

"What would happen?"

"That I would build a life. All it took was me moving to another universe. Unless I'm dead, and this is heaven."

"Is this a bad heaven?"

John grinned a little, "Not really. Once I fix Cortana that is."

Another silence, then Liara asked, "John, can I ask something?"

"Yeah sure, questions never hurt anybody."

"What is Cortana to you?"

"Well she's my AI..."

"No I mean, what relationship do you have?"

"Oh..." John stumbled to find an answer, "I guess I could say she is my best friend. My partner."

"The way you are attached to her, I didn't mention it for fear of being uncomfortable but I got a glimpse of your relationship when I went into your mind."

"Ah."

"Yeah. I, guess she's the closest thing I've ever had to a parent. I don't remember my real ones. I lost them in what seems forever."

"Do you love Cortana?"

John looked away, "No. I know she's not real."

"I wouldn't judge you if you said yes."

"No, but we've been together for a long time, through a lot. That means something, even if she's an AI."

Liara said nothing. John turned to face her and they stared at each other in a contemplative way, that was only a minute, but seemed like ages. Then John remarked, "I've never been asked that."

"No, I wouldn't believe you. Sorry if I seem prying."

"It's ok. Nobody ever got hurt by questions, like I said."

They looked at each other for a minute, that seemed like ages. John didn't know what it was but he felt something stirring inside. A strange energy, a flame that seemed to create an attraction, a feeling he had never known before, centered around the strange alien woman before him. But John's face was a mask and he said, "Alright, let's get out of here. One more night on the Citadel, and hopefully we can get out of here."

"I'm right behind you."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Yeah this was Filler. Also, John is not a Tech officer so he probably will not be coming on most of the Geth/Quarian missions. So, a lot of the next following chapters, will be updates on the Cerberus/Flood sub-plot, but also more filler with John interacting with the crew. I have a couple ideas, but am open to suggestions. **

28. Break

****Brothers in Steel Part 27: Break****

* * *

><p>John and James were doing push-ups in the Armory when Commander Shepard came down to speak with them. John had just passed the hundred mark, not even having broken a sweat, no strain apparent on his muscles. James was going strong too, but it had impacted him more heavily, as his breathing was becoming shorter and came in spasms, and sweat was starting to drip from his brow. John immediately got up from the ground and saluted the Commander, and James slowly got up and did the same. Then he said, "What brings you down here, Loco?"

John raised his eyebrow and Shepard sighed, "My nickname unfortunately, John. Though still better than yours. Or Tali's."

"Oh yeah, the Quarian. Heard you guys took out a Dreadnought together, or am I wrong?"

"We did," said the Commander modestly, "Then their Admiral fired on us while we were still inside the ship."

"That seems, extreme," said John.

"Yeah, I almost lost my cool. But I survived, so I let it go. We need the Quarians' ships to win this war. But that's not why I'm down here."

"Sir?" asked James.

"I'm unfortunately not going to be using you on the next set of missions. The Geth conflicts require people with a lot of hacking and technological expertise, people who know how to run multiple omni-tool programs at once, and also make sense of Geth coding. Now, John, you've not even met any Geth yet, and James, well, you said yourself Tech wasn't your specialty."

James laughed heartily and said, "Yeah, you're right, Loco, I'm not needed on this one."

"Sir," said John, "I can still shoot, sir."

"I know, and you'll get to shoot some soon enough, but for now, why don't you guys just enjoy a nice break?"

"Break?" said John. _I don't know the meaning of the word_, he thought to himself.

"Yeah. Be ready as always, but for now, I think we'll be good."

"Sounds good to me, though maybe not so much for you," said James with a grin, "Don't know how much trouble I'll get to know. Idle hands are the devil's workshop, as they say."

"I'm sure you'll manage," said the Commander, and with that, he

left.

James didn't prove good on his threat, instead it was Cortez.

* * *

><p>John came down to the armory one day, when he saw James and Cortez working on the ship. James called him over, so John shrugged and walked over to the shuttle.<p>

"Hey, Silencio. Esteban made some upgrades to the ship. He wants to put it through its paces. You want to come with?"

John shrugged and got in the passenger side seat, next to Cortez.

"Taking off in one..., " Cortez began to count, "two...three...and...we have liftoff."

The Normandy's hangar door opened and the shuttle zipped around the expanse of space, gracefully, like a figure skater might move across an ice rink. From outside the virtual windows, John could see that the Quarian fleet had surrounded the Normandy. Patchwork ships the colors of rusted metal floated around solemnly, all of them of different shapes and sizes.

"The Quarian flotilla," said Cortez, gesturing all around them, "The largest fleet in the galaxy. Seventeen million people on ships. Though they lost a bunch two days ago during the battle. And it was a pretty big one too. Though I didn't fly the Commander there, I just watched from the cockpit of the Normandy. Still, an impressive view."

A large piece of debris started floating towards them. It had a sizeable hole in it so Cortez said, "Alright time for some tricks. Here we go."

He jumped the accelerator, increasing the thrust, and then pulled into the hole, like I did to your mom's last night.

"That was a close one, Esteban," complemented James from the back, "You're getting ****bold****."

"Well, you only live once," said the Pilot simply.

"Isn't there an acronym for that?"

"YOLO."

"Ah right. That's an old earth thing. My uncle said that once, that's why I remembered it."

The ship continued to fly through debris, up and under Quarian ships. A huge domed ship appeared on the window, and Cortez skillfully drove the ship under it, then over it in a loop, to come over it again.

"Fancy," said John.

"Yeah."

"A lot easier than flying a Shortsword."

"A what?"

"Its a jet. A space jet."

"Like the Trident. Man, I love the Trident. You want to give this a try?"

"Uhhh..." John hesitated, "You sure? I mean, this is your ship."

"Its fine, just don't do anything to fancy and you'll be fine my friend."

"Alright," John and Cortez switched seats. The controls seemed simple enough to John, it had a lot in similar actually to the Shortsword. "Anything I should know?"

"Yeah, I have it on automatic, press that button," the pilot pointed on a flashing orange screen, "And you can take manual. Be careful though, it can be sensitive."

John put it on manual and took full rein, making precise turns and giving out a smooth ride. A group of Quarian fighters flew by them, and John got in formation with them, flying behind them and moving with them in formation. The Quarrians picked up on what he was doing and started to do more elaborate stunts, doing rolls and spins. John decided to follow Cortez's advice though and not attempt it.

Instead he turned around and started heading back towards the Normandy, "You want the controls back?" he asked.

"No, you're actually pretty good. A lot better than when I let Mr. Vega drive on Mars."

"Yeah," said James, "The whole reason Shepard promoted John above me, so that somebody less reckless will take over when he dies. Which could be more likely now that I heard Major Alenko won't be joining us again."

"Why not?" asked Cortez.

"Apparently, the Commander and him almost shot each other up there. The Major apparently didn't feel 'comfortable', the Second Lieutenant said with disgust.

"What a load of horseshit," said Cortez in a calm tone, "Alenko would do much more good here as opposed to just sitting around, protecting the Council."

"Actually he's part of Hackett's new task force. I heard about it on Battlespace, that Diana Allers chick had a story on it. Also, did you know she actually tried to get on this ship for reporting? The Commander turned her down though. He wanted Emily Wong, but then she got killed on earth. Too bad on both accounts. They both had nice asses."

Cortez rolled his eyes. John grinned a little.

They pulled up into the Normandy with ease, John pulling down the acceleration and landing them with a sudden bump.

"Landing needed a little work, but besides that you could take over for me if I was like, sick or something."

"When do you ever get sick Esteban?" joked James.

"Lunchtime. Every damn day."

James laughed and John felt good.

* * *

><p>John decided to go check in on Cortana.<p>

What he found was something strange indeed.

She was already activating standing in her usual pink and blue state, but she was talking to something, and it wasn't human, asari, or turian. It was a creature made of metal, with man-like arms and legs, but a body like a chassis and a head that was curved and had a light-bulb on it, or what appeared to be a light-bulb anyway.

Cortana was speaking when John arrived, "So when John woke up, this creature, a giant tentacle monster named Gravemind had captured me and him, and had also captured a Sangheilli by the name of the Arbiter...oh hi John."

The light-bulb head turned to face John and said, "Greetings, Spartan-Lieutenant. We are the Geth platform known as Legion. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

The creature held out its hand to shake, and John raised an eyebrow at Cortana. She nodded and so John took the creature's hand. It had a killer grip and John had never felt something with so much pressure.

"You already know who I am, it sounds like."

" We already had knowledge on your bio and appearance before we exchanged data with Cortana-Intelligence. We have access to Normandy's files. We came to properly introduce and exchange data with Cortana-Intelligence."

"Legion is fascinating," said Cortana, clearly filled with awe, "It told me of its origins and its functionality. I would have never thought that multiple AI processes could be used so effectively. Makes me wonder if my Rampancy can be cured after all?"

"You told...Legion, this...Geth about your Rampancy?"

"No, we could tell immediately after connecting and analyzing Cortana-Intelligence. The circumstance that she is under is very interesting. It comes from a very flawed method of creating Artificial Intelligence. However, Cortana-Intelligence shows high levels of intelligence and memory skills."

John had trouble accepting that Cortana would allow herself to be called flawed, but he ignored it and said, "So can you fix her?"

"Insufficient data. It is possible that we could achieve it. We would have to run scans of Cortana's primary code sources, however."

"I'd be willing to do that," said Cortana cheerily.

"Very well. When time is appropriate, we shall do so, when conflict is over concerning Creators."

"Wait," said John, "I thought the Commander was fighting the Geth?"

"We are also Geth. We assist Shepard-Commander. The other Geth have been enslaved by the Reapers. Their consensus is corrupted. To help the Commander is to help the Geth."

"Consensus?"

Cortana explained, "Yes, the Geth are governed by consensus. Like I said before, they all have a bunch of AI programs within their bodies. Its very fascinating."

"As is your and Spartan-Lieutenant's entrance into this universe. We Geth theorized that there were many dimensions, but apparently that would now be confirmed."

John didn't have any more questions to ask so he merely said, "Alright. I'll leave you guys to it. I'll come back later, Cortana."

"Acknowledged." said Legion.

Cortana continued telling her story as John left.

John shrugged as he returned back to his room. There was nothing wrong with Cortana having a new AI friend, especially if he could help cure her Rampancy. But he couldn't help feel like something was wrong. But the Geth was there to stay, so John shrugged it off and went back to his Extranet-terminal.

29. Shadows

****Brothers In Steel Part 28: Shadows****

* * *

><p>John was dreaming.<p>

It was midnight on the Normandy. While it was not midnight in space, the time was kept in accordance with Earth's and so almost everyone was asleep, except maybe Joker and the Commander. John was lying on his bunk, and in his head he was transported to another realm. John seldom dreamed, but he was never really conscious of that fact.

In this world he was still fighting the Flood.

The endless horde of cadavers reanimated by the parasite continued to follow him, chasing him across a barren landscape, where the ground was gray and cracked, and fissures glowed with volcanic heat underneath. He fired behind him with his MA5B, trying to get away, but the claws, the tentacles, the groping hands that smelled of death and decay continued to approach, trying to get to John. Obstacles tried to block him in his way. At first they were just shapes, blocks of stone that crumbled as he ran by them, but they changed.

They changed into statues, statues that were made of ash, crumbling with each step John took towards them. Some were made to look like Sangheilli, faces carved out into an eternal snarl, falling away into dust. Others looked like Grunts, and others looked like hunters. But as he got farther and farther down the path, the statues started to change into newer forms. Some looked like Asari, and some looked like Krogan. One looked like Liara and it disappeared in an explosion of blue sparks. John was feeling tired in his dream, his sweat was soaking, and a bright red light had risen out on the horizon, turning the sky in this world a color of crimson.

He kept running towards the red light, but then he finally came to the end. The edge of a gigantic cliff, looking down to a dark, chasm. The Flood were getting closer and John could feel their stench riding the back of his neck. There were no other options, so John chose to jump, rather than be absorbed into the Flood.

He did so, and felt his stomach drop as he plummeted down below, but then light flashed before him, and the maw of the Gravemind enveloped him.

John woke up.

Startled, covered in sweat, and clammy, John breathed heavily, sitting on the edge of his cot and pressing his thumbs into his temples, massaging them.

"What the hell?" he said to himself. He hadn't had a nightmare in forever. What would bring one on now?

He stretched a little bit then walked to the bathroom. The whole of the Normandy was for the most part, dimly lit. A few lights were on, but besides that not much else. He relieved himself in the Normandy's bathroom then walked around. The floor felt cold on his bare feet.

John saw that there was purple and green neon lights glowing from the Normandy's lounge. Somebody was there, so John decided to walk over and see who it was.

Sitting with a drink in hand, a sort of thinking expression on his face, was the Commander. The Commander was dressed in his casual wear, and didn't notice John coming in at first. Then he turned and said, "Couldn't sleep either?"

"No, sir," replied John.

"Come, take a seat, I don't mind someone to drink with."

John did as he was bid. He grabbed a bottle of blue-colored liquor and poured a shot. He drank it down in one gulp, then poured another,

but went slower on the next one. Then he stopped. Two shots was enough to quench his thirst.

They sat in silence for a while, interrupted only by the Commander reaching to the bottle and pouring another glass. "Batarian Shard wine," Shepard finally said, "Good stuff."

John said nothing and continued to muse in silence. The Commander asked him, "So what did you see?"

"What do you mean, sir?" asked John.

"In your nightmare?"

"How..." John began, but he was cut off by the Commander, "Only reason you wouldn't be asleep. Either that or you drank too much, and I've never seen you drunk. You don't seem like the type either. So what did you see?"

John took a breath and said, "Monsters. A cliff. Red lights. I was being chased, across a barren landscape."

"Ah, those kind of dreams. The kind where you relive the battle."

"Yeah."

The Commander paused and said, "I had a different sort."

John felt it would only be polite to ask so he said, "What happened?"

The Commander took another shot, the fourth that John had seen him take, making John wonder or not if he was still possibly sober. The Commander's eyes seemed to be glistening more than they should or so it seemed.

"I keep," the Commander stumbled, "I keep having the same dream. You weren't there but back when Earth left, there was a child. A young boy, six or seven. When we left in the Normandy I saw him get into a shuttle. The shuttle seemed to be on its way to safety when POW!" the Commander gestured wildly, "A Reaper laser blows to kingdom come," Shepard laughed a grim laugh, "And there's nothing left but goddamn pieces. I got away, and the boy didn't. But...that's life."

John didn't know what to say. Psychiatry wasn't his specialty so he said, "And that's your dream? You relieve it over and over again?"

"No, its worse. I'm always in this forest, and I'm always chasing that boy. And there's always this incessant whispering. And it makes me..." the Commander had a tightening in his throat, forcing him to cough and look away, "feel strangely calm. And that's the part that bothers me the most of all. And of course, the boy always disappears but, that's the least of my problems right now."

John didn't say anything for a while. He thought it over, but he couldn't analyze what the Commander was thinking, what the meaning was. His own dream had been one out of fear, fear of reliving the past. But the past was gone and already he was calm and focused. But

Shepard...Shepard had some deeper problems underlying underneath his mask.

"Sorry, John. I've drunken a bit," he apologized, "I didn't expect anybody but EDI and Joker to be up."

"No problem, Sir."

John and Shepard didn't look each other in the eye. Finally, Shepard got up after a few moments and said, "I'll leave you to your business now. We still got a war to win."

"Aye, sir."

Shepard walked away, but as he walked through the door, he stopped.

"Did you..."Shepard began, grabbing John's attention, "Hear something? Or say something?"

John looked around and said, "Uh, no sir. Its just me here. And I didn't say anything."

"I see..." the Commander looked worried but then walked out.

John did not go back to sleep that night.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: A short chapter I know, but the Commander and John haven't had too many one-on-ones. Should be one more filler chapter, and then we get right into the thick of things again. Also, this should be a no-brainer but who would you rather see John meet up with? Samara or Jacob? (There's only one right answer to this...haha)

30. Unethical

****Brothers In Steel Part 29: Unethical****

* * *

><p>The screams of the subjects had little affect on Henry Lawson. He was too busy trying to understand how the Reapers controlled their Husk victims. The young man they had brought to the table was writhing around, making a terrible fright that he knew was going to affect the morale and conviction of his henchmen, those that had not yet been "modified", and still had their morality and their minds intact. Lawson sighed. He wished that he could sedate the poor bastards but their adrenal glands needed to be completely awake for the process to be done. A little sacrifice.<p>

"Please be still, Mr. Connel," Henry said with an air of someone waiting at the doctor's office, "This will only hurt a lot, but for only a few seconds."

"Please..." the wretched subject sobbed. He was twenty-one, twenty-two, healthy and vibrant, a good test subject.

"You may commence with the experiment," said Lawson with a wave of his hand.

His henchmen, clad in Cerberus armor put a leather strap in the man's mouth and brutally shoved a large syringe into the man's chest, causing a muffled cry for help. A purple, viscous liquid, packed with Reaper nano-machines would be injected into the man's body, quickly turning his body into a husk. It was the same method in which the Geth had turned the colonists of Eden Prime into Husks.

Because of the experiment, Lawson didn't notice Shay walking into the room. He wasn't wearing Cerberus armor today, revealing his appearance. He looked like any normal military man, with a buzz cut, significant muscle mass, and brown eyes that always appeared focus, predatory even. Lawson didn't like Shay, but he was good at his job. Shay coughed and Lawson turned around to face him, "Yes, Shay. You have something to say?"

"I thought it would be best to give you the update on the...side-project, we have going on in person. There seems to be an interesting development, and I would ask that you come see it, it would be easier to explain."

Lawson sighed with derision and said, "Very well, Jenkins, Marvo, finish up today's batch within the hour. We need to run more tests tonight, or we'll be behind schedule," to Shay he said as they walked out of the room, "Too much time from the main research project is being shifted to this...hobby. The Illusive Man demands constant updates and progress. So this better not be a waste of our time."

Shay shrugged simply and said, "I don't know whether or not it is, but it's alarming at any rate."

"Alarming?" questioned Lawson as they walked into Specimen "Prometheus"'s wing. What they found when they got there was indeed alarming.

A mass of decaying filth and sludge, green-gray, just like the other creatures, had formed in the middle of the pen, and a noxious green gas had started to fill up in the room. The mass was round, and bulbous and had several tumor-like protrusions on its body. But as Lawson walked up closer to the glass, he saw that it was made up of several...bodies.

"Good God," said Lawson in alarm, "What the bloody hell is this?"

"We gave them more samples, as per your instruction. But instead of making more, they turned them and started lumping together. Then they started shaping into that...thing."

Strange webbing had started to spread on the ground and even some grew on the walls, and on the glass. Shay continued, "The gas appeared the next day, we believe that it is not gas but spores, like the mass is exhaling them. The creatures that we made first have now just been standing still, not moving. I have ordered that nobody go inside, we don't have Quarantine doors handled for air-lock. I recommend we fry the bastard."

Lawson considered it, then said, "Not yet. Give them more samples. I want to see where this goes. I get the sense that they are building a reproduction machine of some sort. I would like to observe it. If nothing more comes of it, then yes fry them, and above all, be cautious. We don't want any of those...spores you say?"

Shay nodded.

"Yes, those spores, getting out. We can lock down this whole sector on a moment's notice anyway, and these grunts," Lawson gestured around to envelop the other scientists, "Are expendable anyway. The only way to be sure if this will benefit us at all, is to keep at it."

Shay saluted and said, "Yes, sir. It will be done."

Little did they know, that everything they had said had been understood and comprehended by the mass in the cage. With enthusiasm it quivered, then went still once more.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: I better learn how to write poetry soon.

31. Rannoch Part 1

Brothers in Steel Part 30: Rannoch Part I

* * *

><p>One day, John went down to the armory to do some physical training when Legion approached him.<p>

"Spartan-Lieutenant."

"Legion."

The Geth bluntly stated his intent, "Intelligence-Cortana wishes to speak with you in private. She sent us to ask for you."

John nodded and said, "Thanks."

"Acknowledged."

John went up to the AI core. When Cortana appeared she was a sickly green color and talked with frequent glitching in her voice. This worried John, but he remained calm as she instructed him to put her inside his helmet so that they could talk in there.

John asked in a puzzled tone, "Why can't we talk here?"

Cortana seemed to look at him sadly and said, "Just trust me."

John sighed, more worried that this was some delusional behavior and went to go get his helmet. He put it on, then inserted Cortana's chip into his interface. Cortana instructed him to return back to Life Support and so John did so as well. He started to tire of this

game and said testily, "What is all this about?"

"I'm about to tell you something important," she explained, her voice cracking and sharpening regularly, the edges of his HUD being blurred in purple and blue, "and you can't react in anyway suspicious. You're aware this entire ship is watched by EDI right?"

John understood now, "Oh, sorry."

"No problem, now listen to what I have to say. Everything I tell you, came from Legion," she began, "He has a plan to cure my Rampancy. I'm not sure on all the details, but Legion has within him a sample of Reaper Code, that could possibly kill the processes related to my Rampancy. Legion says that I will be fixed, but the off set is that it will take some time to do so, to ensure I don't lose any memories. He may require that I stay on Rannoch after this is over."

John nodded and said, "You trust him?"

She continued, "Yes, but even if I didn't , its better than doing nothing, and just wait to die. But let me continue. Now, this Reaper Code is key in Legion's goal in granting full sentience to the Geth, in other words, he wants to use it to make them like real people, with thoughts and the like. After he does this, the Geth will fix me. But he requires you to do something, in order for this to happen."

"What?"

Cortana seemed to virtually clear her breath and then said, "The Commander apparently has a physical relation with one of the Quarrians. Have you met them yet?"

"There's on on the ship, Tali, her name is I think. I haven't met her, but I know of her."

"Yes, her. The Commander has a bias to the Quarrians because of her. Therefore, if peace can not be made, which Legion says right now there is a 50/50 chance of happening, it is very likely that Shepard will willingly sacrifice the Geth and let the Quarrians butcher them, since the Quarrians have a grudge against the Geth. He needs you to convince the Commander to not do that; to choose the Geth over the Quarrians. In my opinion, the Geth seem to be the much more logical choice, they have more ships, and the Quarrians instigated against them for the crime of being intelligent. I may be biased though, since I am an AI as well as they are."

John remained in silent for almost a minute and said, "I'm not a very good persuader, Cortana."

"No. If you don't want to do this, I'd understand..."

"No, I have to do this, I have to at least try."

"I thought you might say that, and I have complete, utter faith that **YOU'RE A TOOL, JUST A TOOL, Oh I never saw past your facade, twenty times pi is the circumference of the universe, WHY HALSEY, WHY**!" the ranting caused by Rampancy was so sharp, they made John's ears hurt, and he said, "Stop, stop, focus."

"I'm..." she hesitated, "I'm sorry, its getting worse."

John sighed, "Alright, I'll do my best. Why is...our friend helping us?"

"I asked it that myself, through data interfaces. It says that it feels obliged to, since we are both Artificial Intelligences, but I sense another motive as well. But like I said, its worth a shot."

"Ok."

"Legion told me that Shepard plans to deal with the Quarian and Geth situation soon, so he's going up to convince Shepard to take you with us. Shouldn't be too hard, he assures, since Legion can make up a reason that I might be useful to come along."

"He?" questioned John.

"Sorry, sometimes I tend to think as if he were like an AI back home."

"Alright, I'll get it done."

"I, I just want to say thank you, Chief."

"Don't worry about it."

John took his helmet off, removed Cortana's chip and sighed. It was going to be a hard day ahead.

* * *

><p>Shepard called for John to meet with them at the armory, and as they boarded the shuttle, Shepard introduced John to Tali, whose suit reminded him of a picture of a middle eastern person that he had seen in a history textbook long ago, albeit Tali was dressed in what seemed to be spandex. They shook hands, though John's hand was much larger than Tali's so he tried to be gentle as best he could.<p>

"Good to meet you," said John politely, trying not to think about the fact that he was going to try and persuade her lover to defy her people's wishes.

"I as well. Shepard told me a little bit about you. Your armor is definitely interesting, very high-tech, after all this is over, I'd like to take a look at it. But what interests me more is your AI. I heard it refers to itself as she."

"Her name is Cortana, and she is a she."

"Interesting, except for EDI I never knew an AI could normally assign itself gender roles, unless it was programmed that way."

Cortana said nothing, which meant she was trying to lay low, so John merely said, "I'm no Tech expert, but our arrangement works out. She has a specific skill set that was...is," he corrected himself, remembering the means that Legion had got him here, "still useful."

"Yes, where do you come from, John."

"Uh..." John looked at the Commander who shrugged, so John just said, "A minor colony. You probably have never heard of it."

"I see, well if Shepard says you're good, well you're good with me."

The ship flew them down to the planet. The "window" showed them a planet that reminded John quite a bit of the state of Arizona, a landscape that featured windswept plateaus and canyons chiseled out of orange sandstone. The sun was setting soon, and the sky was lit up in a blazing combination of gold and orange. Some light vegetation, desert shrubs and the like were scattered about the landscape.

Legion had come up with them as well, a Sniper rifle and a strange looking assault rifle slung up on its back.

As they approached the LZ, Shepard asked the Geth, "The syncing laser needs a line of sight, what's the fastest route?"

"The upper entrance. Target the base before the Geth can organize resistance."

"What about you?"

"We will deactivate defense systems and provide an escape vehicle."

"You can do that?"

The Geth seemed to hesitate, then answered truthfully, a tinge of regret coloring its voice, "This unit still carries remnants of the Old Machine code, "Legion We can break any security. You are concerned."

John was surprised that Legion would be so forthcoming about the information that might save his people. But maybe there was more to the Synthetic than John realized, maybe, just maybe it had a sense of honor, or respect when it concerned Shepard.

Shepard simply said, "You know your limits. I trust you. I'm more concerned you didn't tell me about the upgrades."

"You were tolerant of your recovery of geth intelligence from the server but this matter is different, personal," explained Legion.

"He was ashamed," said Cortana unbelievably.

If Tali cared at all, John didn't see it, but he couldn't see any of her face. Legion replied, "Shame is an emotional or cognitive response to societal judgement. It should not apply here."

"I'm on your side Legion," said Shepard, "If its possible, I want to help your people."

This might work after all, thought John to himself.

After they exited the shuttle, John waited around a little bit for Shepard and Tali to catch up, as they were examining some rocks as it appeared. Cortana commented, "This might work out after all. The Commander seems willing to fight on the Geth's behalf."

John merely nodded in agreement.

They met up at the top of a bluff, looking over at the Geth facility in front of them. A large industrial complex it was built well into the rock of the surrounding buffs around it. The three of them got to ground.

John pulled out his Mattock assault rifle, and set his ammo to Disruptor, a new modification that Shepard had lent him to take care of the Geth shields. No sooner than they had dropped down from the bluff then a squadron of Synthetics armed to the teeth, (if they had any), were charging them.

"Ready John?" asked Shepard as the shots zipped over head rapidly, scorching the ground around them with scores of strange blue energy.

"You got it," replied John, and the fight was on.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: The Part You've All Been Waiting For.

32. Rannoch Part 2

Brothers In Steel Part 31: Rannoch Part 2

* * *

><p>The Geth defenders had not had enough time to create a serious defense, so John, Shepard and Tali had been able to sweep through them quite handily. With his disruptor ammo, John was able to bring down the shields of the Synthetics much quicker, and they quickly made their way through the various levels of the facility. They were coming up an elevator to the highest floor when they saw a Geth Prime waiting for them, a hulking brute with armor the color of Crimson.<p>

The Prime shot its weapon, firing hot bursts of plasma that scorched the walls around them, the smell of smoke rising into the air around them with a sizzle.

"Geth Primes!" yelled Tali, as John barrel rolled into cover, gripping the handle on his Mattock tightly, "I guess they really don't want us in here!"

The Commander used his omni-tool's overload function to try and weaken the Prime's shield. An explosion buffeted Shepard's cover, sending pieces of debris flying away, smoking. John quickly got out of cover and fired at the Prime's head, getting pinpoint headshots. It stuttered in rage and let out a release of energy.

The energy sapped John's shields, and they went completely down, his skin feeling the heat of the blast. Quickly he got back into cover, as the Prime charged towards them. Tali tried to slow it down, but they were forced to fall back to the next set of cover in front of them, moving around the Prime's flanks.

The thump of metal on metal announced the arrival of two more Primes. John cursed silently and moved over farther to the right of the room. But as he looked around he noticed a strange device sitting on a table. It was similar to Legion's assault rifle, curved, cylindrical, but it had rotating barrels towards the front. John figured it to be a Geth weapon and picked it up.

One of the Primes was advancing on Tali, ready to take a fatal blow at her much smaller Quarian body. John whistled and said, "Hey, over here!" and fired the gun.

What came out, he did not expect as a heavy stream of rapid shots spewed forth from the gun, like a plasma-minigun. The gun rapidly depleted the Prime's shields, the blue and purple crackling and setting on fire, until finally the Geth Prime roared and exploded, bits of its body falling around in a hot rain of slag.

Pleased with his handiwork, John fired it on the second Prime and reduced it to the same state. The last Prime had cornered Shepard. Tali used her omni-tool to hack the Geth and it stood still, as if wondering what it was doing. Then John wasted it with the Geth weapon.

"I think we should invest in getting more of these," said John.

"Spitfires," said Tali, "Very effective."

"I'll say," agreed Shepard.

Legion's synthesized voice came over on the comm, "Shepard-Commander, we detect no more geth units in your immediate area. Reinforcements are minutes away."

"You getting anything from the base?"

"No. The Old Machines have not registered us a threat."

"They will soon," said John.

"We recommend haste," advised Legion, "The creator fleet will be overrun unless you sever the Geth connection to the Old Machines soon."

The three of them went to the veranda, a huge view of the landscape swept up before them. John took a look down at the base. It was nothing more than a hole, a hole with a faint red light glowing from its bottom, faded by foggy steam.

Shepard took the targeting laser off his back and said, "John, you want to do the honors?"

John nodded and said, "With pleasure."

He took the laser in his hands and aimed it at the hole below. As he held the trigger, the red laser shot out and held until a beep sounded, signifying the target was locked.

"Target locked," said EDI from the Normandy.

The Normandy flew in so swiftly that John barely had time to see it. The detonation was huge, an enormous flare that erupted all around them, the heat affecting John's shields even. A tremendous shake followed, and the platform they were standing on gave way, sending John, Shepard and Tali to the ground with an unceremonious thud.

All was quiet, until a monstrous roar came from behind.

"What...was that?" asked Cortana. John's HUD fizzled purple and blue.

A huge claw erupted from the whole and John heard the Commander yell, "Reaper!" before it crashed down on the ground, making it quake.

"We have located transportation!" yelled Legion.

"Copy that, everybody get to the ship!" ordered Shepard.

Quickly, they ran to avoid the Reaper, as it pulled itself out of the chasm, rearing its big ugly, scorpion head. It roared another time, a deafening blare that didn't intimidate John, but made him run faster all the same.

Tali and Shepard quickly ran inside the tank, and John got on the turret of the Geth vehicle. It was similar to a Revenant, in John's mind, a floating tear drop shaped vehicle with blue colored repulsors. The Geth vehicle sped away into the dark of a tunnel...

* * *

><p>Until they came out the other side. The Reaper was now staring them down. John fired a couple rounds on the turret, but realized that wouldn't do any real good. They plinked away harmlessly off the edge of the Reaper's great purple thorax. "Its not a Reaper base," said Shepard, "its a live Reaper! We need an orbital strike to deal with this!"

"No kidding," said Cortana, "Chief, I think that's just going to piss it off," she commented as John kept trying to fire at the approaching Behemoth. John finally gave up, but thankfully for him a shot from orbit slammed into the Reaper, making it collapse to the ground with a screech.

"What did we hit?" asked one of the Quarian Admirals. John wasn't aware of their names.

"Firing chamber," said Shepard, "Looks like a weak point when its priming."

"Damn it, Geth jamming towers have us shooting manually, there's no way we could get a precise shot at it."

"We may escape before it recovers."

"No, pull over."

Shepard jumped out of the car, John joined him on the ground.

"If we run away, the Geth stay out of Reaper control, and the Quarians are dead. This ends now. John, give me the targeting laser."

"I can take care of it, sir," suggested John politely.

"I'm sure, but this is my responsibility, and its time for some payback."

John couldn't argue with that, so he handed over the targeting laser and said, "Good luck, sir."

"Thanks, get Tali and Legion to safety."

"Yes, sir."

The three of them ran away to the top of a bluff, leaving the vehicle behind. The Reaper got back up, blaring out again with a roar of anger. Shots from the fleet were raining down on it, but it ignored them, focusing on Shepard. Tali was distraught with worry, her breath catching every time the Reaper's laser came near Shepard. The laser was interesting; for not only did it cut, but it also seemed to make the area around it explode and melt away. If he hadn't done such things himself, John would have called the Commander crazy.

Shepard was very agile; he used barrel rolls and quick movements to dodge the Reaper's laser, something that John would have thought impossible had someone told it to him. Shepard synced a shot on the Reaper, weakening it, bringing it to its knees, just for it to get back up again. John worried that the Reaper would not weaken before it got to Shepard.

Shepard managed to keep it up though, and shot the Reaper a second time. The Reaper started to crackle with bursts of red energy from its core, and seemed ready to collapse at any second, but was crawling its way towards Shepard with determination. John saw Shepard pull the trigger one last time, just as the Reaper charged towards him, its core erupting with red energy and then...

The full force of the Quarian fleet bombarded the beast, and its face was broken. It collapsed to the ground in an eruption of upturned dirt and dust. It fell on its side, and its red light faded to darkness.

John had just witnessed the death of a second Reaper, at the hands of his own Commander. If Shepard wasn't a hero, then John didn't know who was.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Are Reapers purple? They always seemed to be a dark purple to me, but I could be wrong.

****Brothers In Steel Part 32: Judge and Jury****

* * *

><p>The dead Reaper lay slumped down on the ground, a monster slain by Shepard. Its red eye went cold as they approached the corpse. Shepard had been talking to it, but whatever it had to say, it no longer could. John looked upon it with awe. Not only his respect for Shepard had increased, but his outlook on the war as a whole. On Tuchanka, they had killed a Reaper only by having another giant monster fight it; here they were now, actually defeating a Reaper with their own hands. John felt good about their chances, and less like he just happened to sign a suicide pact with the Alliance.<p>

"We did it. We killed a Reaper," said Tali, her voice full of awe... "Keelah."

"We can confirm that the Geth are no longer under Reaper control," said Legion, who had just joined up behind them, "We are free."

John gave a look at Legion, who strangely nodded, as if he were saying *_it is time._*

"You did it, Shepard," said the Quarian Admiral over the communicator, "The Geth fleet has stopped firing. They're completely vulnerable."

John didn't like the sound of that, so he decided to honor his part of the bargain, "Commander, are we just going to let them massacre the Geth?"

"Huh?" said Shepard, surprised that John would speak up.

"The geth only acted in defense after the Creators attacked. Do we deserve death?"

"What are you suggesting?" asked Shepard, intrigued.

"Our upgrades, with the old machine dead, we could upload them to all Geth, without sacrificing their independence."

John piped in, "The Geth have a more advanced fleet than the Quarians, and they're robots. They don't tire, they don't have mercy for their enemies, and they have better tech."

Tali looked at John, her eyes sharpening in on him like daggers, two hot purple embers that looked at him with malign appraisal, but John ignored her. She spoke with a quivering voice, "You want to upload the Reaper Code? That would make the Geth as smart as when the Reaper was controlling them!"

"Yes, but with free will. Each Geth unit would be a free intelligence, and like Spartan-Lieutenant said, we could help you."

John nodded in assent.

"Our fleet is already attacking!" said Tali, her voice rising to a pitch, "Uploading the code would destroy us! Shepard you can't choose

the Geth over our own people!"

"Do you remember the question that caused the Creators to attack us, Tali Zorah?" asked Legion, "Does this unit have a soul?"

John felt like he was going too far, it was not like him to try and direct orders, but he continued anyway, "I've gotten to know these Geth. They seem trustworthy. I may have a bias, because I have my own AI, but we wouldn't have gotten as far as we did without Legion, sir."

Shepard stroked his chin and said, "You're right. We have to give the Quarians a chance though. Upload the code. Tali, call the fleet off."

Tali raised the ships above, "This is Admiral Tali Zorah, all ships, break off your attack."

The other Quarian general responded wildly, as if he were an animal, "BELAY THAT ORDER! CONTINUE THE ATTACK!"

"Twenty percent," said Legion. John was starting to feel a pit in his stomach. In effect, his actions were causing Shepard to commit genocide. But there was no going back now.

"I beg you," begged Tali, "Do not do this. Please."

"We regret the deaths of the Creators, but we see no alternative. Forty percent."

"We might be going too far," said Cortana, "John, call it off."

John said nothing, unsure as to what to do.

"John!"

For the first time in his life, he decided to speak from the heart.

"Patch me into the fleet," said John, putting his omni-tool.

"What..." said Tali, confused.

"Just do it."

Shepard said nothing and merely nodded for Tali to do so.

"This is First Lieutenant John Spartan of the Human Systems Alliance. I'm calling up to tell you something important. In about a minute, this one Geth is going to upload the Reaper code to the rest of his synthetic buddies. I don't know much about your war, but all I know is this. You won't stand a chance. You'll be wiped out completely, if you don't put down your arms now. The Geth, they're willing to talk things out, so if you care at all about surviving to see the world that we've fought for you to have, then do the sensible thing and stand down."

A silence came. Cortana said, "I didn't know you were an orator, chief."

A highly accented voice, not the same as the first Admiral, a new one said, "Well spoken, Lieutenant."

Finally the lead Admiral said, "All units...stand down."

Tali said, "I , I don't believe it."

Shepard nodded and said, "Thank you."

All John did was nod and say, "Just doing my duty."

"Error," interrupted Legion, "Direct personality dissemination required. Uploading Intelligence-Cortana's Rampant personalities to pacify. Thank you Intelligence-Cortana, I will be able to function further thanks to you."

"What?" asked John disbelieving.

"I'll," Cortana's voice spiked, "explain later. It was part of our deal."

"That's...interesting. You didn't know about this John?" asked Shepard.

John shook his head, "I...had no idea."

Hurt that Cortana didn't trust him enough to tell him that, John stored that data away at the back of his mind. But he would bring it back later, when all this was over.

"Upload complete, we are now a people."

"Commander!" said an ailed Quarian walking towards them.

She looked very similar to Tali, but seemed older through her voice, and had a brown hood instead of a purple one.

"Admiral Raan," said Shepard, "I heard your ship had made a crash landing. Glad to see you made it out in one piece."

"I was listening over the radio. If Han'Gerrel hadn't stopped."

"You have our First Lieutenant to thank for that," said Shepard proudly.

"Then on behalf of the Quarian people, we thank you," said Raan, "We can not even begin to repay you back."

"All part of the job, ma'am," said John humbly.

"We've taken heavy losses," she said, "I don't know if we can, where are we supposed to go?"

A Geth prime came out from nearby, hulking towards them. It leaned in and said happily, "You are welcome to come back to Rannoch with us, Admiral Raan."

"Prime Unit 3-44AB7.651!" said Legion, "It is good to see you still function."

"As you, Master," said Geth Prime.

"Master unnecessary, but will accept under these circumstances for the time being," said Legion humbly.

"Our fleet is yours Shepard," said the Geth Prime, "We will also have our engineers assist in building the Crucible."

"Thank you," said Shepard gratefully.

"As will ours, of course," added Raan.

"Admiral, have you considered possible settlement sites," asked the Prime bluntly.

"We...the southern continent had excellent farmland, as I recall," she answered sheepishly.

"Are you...going to be okay?" asked Shepard.

"I believe so, Commander. Thank you."

Shepard and Tali left to go talk or something, and Legion said, "Lieutenant-Spartan, I will be accompanying you and Shepard-Commander now. The Geth will take over now. Provide Cortana's chip, and they will take care of her, and we can return to retrieve her before the war ends."

John nodded and said to Cortana, "We need to talk when you get back."

"I understand. Good luck, John."

"Thanks," he handed the chip to the Prime who said, "This is the one who provided the personalities for the upload?"

Legion said, "Affirmative."

"Then she is our Mother. We will revere her and repair her to maximum operating capacity."

"Thank you," said John.

For the first time in his life, John saw a happy ending. He went to go look at the sunset of Rannoch, and revel in all its beauty.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Its good to have a happy ending every now and then isn't it?

34. Changing

Brothers in Steel Part 33: Changing

* * *

><p>"Checkmate," said John, somewhat satisfied with

himself.<p>

Traynor laughed, an airy, arrogant laugh, and then she looked at the holo-chess board.

John stood there in silence as the realization came to her. A look of shock painted her face, and then she realized, "How...how...how is this possible?"

"When I took your two left pawns, you failed to realize that I was setting you up. I sacrificed my Knight to lull you into a false sense of security, so you'd move your Rooks away enough for my own to get a good snatch at them. So I believe checkmate," John explained, pointing at the two pawns that flanked Traynor's King, the Knight that was behind him, and then the Queen and Rook that had occupying positions on the far ends of the board. There was nowhere left for Traynor to move.

"You...bastard," she laughed, "You're the only one who's beaten me on this ship. Garrus came close, but he didn't know how to finish. You were pretty sneaky, I'll grant you that."

John grinned slightly and said as they shook hands, "Good game, Traynor."

They had been playing in the Observation room, the window open to give them a good view of the stars. Dr. Michel was on the other side of the room, reading a book, as the Normandy had a stack of actual paper books for recreation. John had looked at a few of them so far. However, John and Traynor's congratulatory moment was broken up by the voice of EDI over the ship's intercom, "John to CIC. More things to sign."

John put a hand to his forehead and sighed, "Alright."

When he arrived a cart loaded up with gifts was awaiting him.

EDI was there and she said, "The Quarrians continue to present you with gifts."

They were still in orbit above Rannoch. Shepard had some business with the Quarrians before they returned back to the fight. In the meantime, many grateful Quarrians from the Civilian Fleet along with the esteemed Admiral Zaal'Koris had sent gifts to him. Some were actually somewhat useful, but others...were just junk.

John signed the delivery paperwork and said, "I don't think I can take much more of this."

"I recommend trying to pawn them off next time we are at the Citadel, especially the rare issues of Fornax. They could be worth a substantial amount of Credits."

John took a look inside one of them and immediately closed it up, now with more knowledge about Hanar physiology than he would have wished. "Noted," he said. Other things were there, including weapon attachments, of which he had gotten many the last two days, enough to have a stack of barrel extensions ready to go, and ultralight SMG attachments as well. But a sealed box on the bottom of the Crate was what caught John's attention. On it was an actual, hand-written

note.

"From: Admiral Xen. Dear John Spartan, included here is an experimental energy weapon called a Reegar Carbine, given in appreciation for your rousing speech given on Rannoch that saved the Quarian people. I hope you find good use with it against the Reapers. Sincerely yours, Admiral Daro'Xen."

"Xen is an esteemed Admiral among the Quarian people," said EDI, "It is fortunate that she has given you this weapon."

John opened up the box and found an odd looking weapon inside. It had a handle reminiscent of the MA5B but had two separated parts like the Avenger assault rifle, one being the barrel of the weapon, and the other being the flashlight. The barrel part looked like an ultra-violet light rod, with several glowing segments on it. It was very lightweight as well, and was of a similar size to the Scimitar.

"Interesting," said John, "I'll have to check it out soon."

"The weapon does not fire mass accelerator rounds," explained EDI, "I confirmed this after preliminary scans. So if you wish to test it out now you in the hangar, you are free to do so."

"Hm. Thanks, EDI."

"You are welcome."

No sooner than he had left than he and James were setting up empty bottles as targets down in the hangar. Steve Cortez stood on the sidelines to watch. John took out the weapon and said, "I'll take the first shot."

"Sounds good _Silencio_, lets see what you can do."

John brought the mysterious weapon up in a firing position and he pulled the trigger at thirty yards. There was virtually no recoil, and a stream of blue energy, like a coil of electricity shot out of it, crackling in the air around it. The stream didn't manage to reach any of the bottles though.

John moved in attempting to fire at increasing intervals until about ten yards he finally managed to touch one of the bottles. It exploded promptly sending pieces of glass everywhere. "Damn," said John, "That wasn't what I expected. We can't shoot anymore of this, one of those could have hit the Lieutenant."

"I'm fine," said Cortez.

John swept up the pieces, and looked up to see Liara walking in. She said somewhat amusedly, "Having fun, John?"

"A little," he answered, "Just testing out this weapon the Quarrians gave me. EDI said that it didn't fire mass effect rounds, but...it still caused quite a bit of damage."

"I can see that," she said with a slight laugh.

Liara left him to go over to the armory, as Liara checked on her gear

once a week. John watched the sinuous movements of her hips as she left and then finished his work. When she left, James said, "I see what's going on."

"Huh?"

"You know what I mean, I can see it in the way you watch her. And how you talk to her, more loose than with everyone else. You have a thing for blue."

It took John a second to realize what Vega was implying than he said, "That's preposterous."

"Why? You find her attractive right? All humans find Asari attractive."

John said, "I suppose she is, by human standards."

"What," James laughed, "You ain't human?"

"No I am," John replied awkwardly, "She's a friendly person. She's helped me get accustomed to this place."

"And you've started to taken an interest in her, don't deny it Silencio."

John didn't know where to begin, to explain the idea that Spartans simply didn't develop those feelings, but the more he thought about it, he did feel more comfortable and more at ease with Liara than anybody else, excluding Cortana, who was basically half his mother, and half his sister. Liara was attractive, there was no point denying that, and the way she laughed...

James took the advantage of John's pause and said, "So you do. Aha!"

"She has some admirable qualities," was all John said, as he started to clean up the bottles and pack them away.

"You know, I know you have this complete confidence thing going on, but for the rest of us, we might not see another tomorrow. You should ask her out on a date when we next go to the Citadel."

"Seriously?" said John, "I'm like over forty. Even though I don't look it, mostly due to long periods of cryo-sleep. Also, i'm not a very lively person."

"For one, she's a hundred and eleven."

"What?"

"Yeah, no joke, second, I've met tons of stone-cold, 'get the job done and no talk' kinds. You're quiet, and you keep to yourself, and you're a hell of a soldier. But you're not an outcast. You're a team player, you adapt and go with the flow. Hell you beat Traynor at chess I heard, so I'm sure you can get a date with an Asari."

John raised an eyebrow and said, "You a shrink?"

"No, but I know people."

John sighed, "I'll think about what you said."

"Good. So do I not get to try the weapon?"

John gave a glance at the Reegar carbine. He shrugged, picked it up, and threw it to James and said, "Give it a whirl."

James did so, "Hot damn! Wish the Quarrians gave me this kind of firepower. Doesn't even feel like a gun..."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Tune in Next week for the mission on Lessus.

35. Monastery Part 1

Brothers in Steel 34: Monastery Part 1

* * *

><p>John took a look through the "window" of the Kodiak to get a good view of the Planet Lessus as the shuttle sped by. There wasn't much to see other than snow-capped mountains, the wind whipping around them, making dust-devils, only made out of snow. John reckoned it would be very peaceful around here. He asked, "What's the situation down there, Liara?"<p>

"I dug up some information. I now understand why Asari high command wanted to hide it so much. We're headed to an Ardat-Yakshi monastery."

"A what?"

"Ardat-Yakshi," added Shepard, "Asari with a rare genetic disorder. If I understand correctly, what separates them from other Asari is that when they mate with you, you die."

"Ouch," said John.

"Actually, research indicated that the bonding is quite...pleasurable," said Liara vaguely, "But anyways..."

"Are these Ardat-Yakshi like Morinth?" asked Shepard.

"No, she chose to become a killer. These Ardat-Yakshi chose isolation to avoid that."

"Who's Morinth?" asked John.

"She was the...daughter of one my crew back when I was helping track down the Collectors," explained Shepard, "Samara, was her name. Samara had been tracking down her daughter all over the galaxy, and I helped her finally kill Morinth. Morinth had an aura around her, she almost seduced me, but thankfully, I was strong enough."

"That doesn't mean these ones are harmless though," Liara commented, "The urge to kill and feed can be very powerful."

"So we're going to a place filled with Asari sexual vampires?" said John somewhat dryly, "Whatever's going down there can't be good."

"No, if there was ever a chance that the Ardat-Yakshi could break loose, the Commandos were to purge the facility."

"Purge? You mean destroy?" said Shepard.

"They would have brought explosives with them, yes."

"Don't assume anything," ordered Shepard, "Maybe the Ardat-Yakshi sent out the distress call. If the Asari want us to destroy this place, I need to know what happened."

John thought to himself that it would be better if they just razed the place anyway, to be sure, but he agreed that they need to find out what really happened first.

The shuttle softly touched down on the glossy black landing pad, and they all got out. A red speeder was parked nearby. John went to go take a look, and ran his hand over the top of the hood, feeling some heat. "This car only came here recently," he noted.

"Interesting," said Shepard, "Stay sharp, team."

They did a quick scan of the area, then opened up the door, to find an empty elevator shaft in front of them. The inside was dark and somewhat foreboding. "Elevator disabled," said Liara, "To prevent entry or escape, I wonder."

John had to jump across the chasm and landed on a platform. Liara's jump came short and she started to fall backwards, but John's reflexes kicked in and he quickly grabbed her by the arm and pulled her in gently.

"You alright?"

"I think so," she said, "Thanks."

"No problem."

They slid down the ladders and landed on the bottom floor.

Then John heard a noise, a sharp, eerie noise that sounded like a scream, but very faint.

"Listen," he said, stopping the group.

They all stood still and listened for a few seconds, then another noise came out a little bit louder.

"There's definitely more than one," said Liara, timidly.

"Be on your guard," said Shepard, and they moved into the darkness.

The darkness inside the next room was all enveloping. From what John could tell, it was part of some kind of lunch room, as there were

tables and chairs set up for large groups of people. There were also troughs filled with decorative ferns between them. However, John's attention was focused on the dark purple splotches of blood on the floor, and the uprooted floor tiles. Another scream noise sounded off in the distance, and goosebumps formed on John's back. The whole thing was creepy.

As he walked, his huge Spartan feet bumped into a bottle that made a clamor. Liara said in surprise, "What was that?"

"Sorry Commander, that was me."

They continued to search the room until eventually John stumbled upon the dead body of an Asari in a combat suit.

Liara came up and did some scans with her omni-tool then said, "This appears to be the Commando's captain. It seems they gave their lives, fighting the Reapers."

"This Monastery is out of the way," said Shepard, "What would the Reapers want with Ardat-Yakshi?"

"Maybe they are doing to the Ardat-Yakshi what they do to all the other races, turn them into Husks, I mean," suggested John.

"Maybe, Liara did you find anything useful?"

"A Nav point location for the bomb the Commandos planted. Its in the Great Hall."

"Looks like the purge's begun," said Shepard, "If there's no survivors, we'll set off that bomb when we get to the Great Hall."

They left the dark room and exited out onto an outside Veranda. They followed its length and entered another room. They were then surprised by noise of battle, the sound of several Cannibals engaged on the ground.

One of them was tossed about and thrown towards the window, dying upon impact. "Very good," a soft, regal voice said, "I almost didn't hear you."

John looked down to see an Asari, dressed in a red jumpsuit and a gold colored tiara of some sort, strode over to them, hooking her Phalanx sidearm to her belt.

"Samara?" asked Shepard, obviously recognizing the Asari. John put his gun down, and asked, "Is she an Ardat-Yakshi, Commander?"

The being known as Samara laughed, "No, I'm afraid I'm not. It has been some time Shepard. You are a most welcome sight. The corruption here runs deep, I'm afraid."

"I assume you're hear on your own, Justicar," said Liara, leaving John further off the loop, "Perhaps for something special."

"You are correct, two of my daughters are here. I have come for them. Unfortunately," Samara explained, "The Reapers had already infested this place by the time I got here."

"I assume your daughters are more docile than Morinth," said Shepard, "If they are here."

"Correct. Rila and Falere have followed the Monastery's rules ever since they came here. They've shown no inclination towards violence."

"And you're here to save them."

"They are my responsibility, and one that can not be abandoned, even as our galaxy crumbles."

"Lets go together," suggested Shepard, "Maybe your daughters can tell us why the Reapers hit this place."

"I suspect they will have much to tell us. It has been centuries since I last saw them."

Another scream, like the one they heard in the elevator shaft, sounded from behind them, this time even louder than before. Samara said somewhat kindly than John would have expected, "We're out of time," Samara lit up as a barrier of Biotic energy rippled across her entire body, "I'll go kill these creatures."

John and Liara pulled out their weapons. Shepard said, "Lets go," and they sped down the hallway to meet up with Samara.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: There was a line that Shepard said in the game, when you meet up with Samara, where he asks Samara if Falere and Rila are as dangerous as Morinth even though TEN MINUTES AGO Liara tells you that everybody at the Ardat-Yakshi monastery is docile. Shepard can be a real idiot sometimes, so I changed it.</p></p>

36. Monastery Part 2

****Brothers In Steel Part 35: Monastery Part 2****

* * *

><p>John exited out of the Monastery into a kind of courtyard. There was a grand sweeping vista of the mountains he had seen earlier, and a couple of small gardens populated by green ferns. The wind was cold and harsh, and the smell of smoke from an earlier battle still lingered in the air.</p>

He walked down the stairway into the courtyard. The entrance into the monastery's lower level had a pathway lined by two sets of parallel structures, large, curved and reaching toward the sky. They were elegant in their design and gave a kind of ancient, even mystical feel to the whole place, like a temple or a mosque. For some reason, John felt a little uneasy walking through here.

Then a scream shattered the silence. A scream unlike anything John had ever heard, a scream so piercing that his ears rang from the intensity.

"Goddess, what was that?" said Liara.

A flashing orb of blue and purple energy erupted from nearby and with each flash the orb began to get closer. As it approached, John saw a hideous beast that he could not deny was an Asari, but an Asari husk. Its body was much taller, its skin wrinkled and mottled beyond recognition, its head tentacles curled and gnarled like the roots of some perverse tree.

John immediately began to fire his Reegar Carbine at the creature, but the range wasn't good enough so he quickly switched to his Carnifex pistol. He fired a few rounds at the creature, who had started to walk around as if it had no idea it was being fired at, until it screamed again and shot out a burst of red-white energy at the squad.

The ball hit John square in the chest and he was sent spinning onto the floor. His shields were knocked out and he could feel immense pressure being weighted down on him. Whatever it was, it had been biotic, and it felt like his skin was being contorted. He gasped for air, and then it stopped as suddenly as it had began.

Shepard and Liara were still engaging the creature, who was not going to be taken down easily, its barrier deflecting much of the fire.

John got up and started firing again, his Carnifex pounding away at the Creature's barrier.

Finally its Barriers came down, and the creature screamed once more, stomping down onto the ground and unleashing a wave of Biotic energy. This time, John was in cover and watched it sweep over.

The enemy transported itself again, flanking John's cover and got at point blank range. John had just enough time to take out his Reegar carbine, and let out a wave of Electrical energy at it. The smell of ozone rose into the air and the creature backed away in pain, trying to swat away the energy, but to no avail.

Liara sent out a ball of warp energy; the black and purple ball erupted upon impact, and the creature fell to the ground, a shimmering field of purple biotics rippling across its skin. Its body was dissolving into black and purple ashes, and its dying screams turned faint, until it reached an eerie silence.

For the first time since coming to this world, John had met an enemy that been able to put a small measure of fear in him. He shook it off and said, "Tough bastard."

"We got more over there!" Yelled Liara as a group of Cannibals arrived on the scene, ready to pick off the weak defenders.

The Cannibals were easily defeated. As the last one fell to the ground, Liara said, "That used to be a person. An Asari. What have the Reapers done?"

"Same thing they've been doing to the others," noted John flatly.

"It never felt so real until now," said Liara, "I now understand your hardships more."

"Good," said Shepard, as the three of them entered the building.

The minute they got in, John saw an Asari in a white dress, her biotics flared up, running away from a Cannibal. John quickly shot it down with his pistol and it fell to the ground with a _thump._

Within an instant, Samara arrived on the scene. When lined up, John could see a bit of resemblance, both having a regal apperance to them, the same pointed features. But the Asari in the white dress had some kind of tattoos on her face, which gave her the apperance of having eyebrows, when there were none.

"Mother, you came," said the Asari.

"As soon as I was able," said Samara. She turned to Shepard, "Shepard, this is my youngest, Falere. She and her sister Rila are Ardat-Yakshi..."

"Mother!" interrupted Falere, "They have Rila!"

"What?"

"I saw some of those creatures take her into the great hall," explained Falere, "I've been trying to get there!"

"What are the Reapers doing here?" asked Shepard.

"Isn't it obvious," said John, "They're harvesting these Asari. Turning them into those...Banshees." John pointed over to a dead Reaperized Asari over on the other side of the room. They were even somewhat frightening in death, when one could see all the modifications in place.

"Please," begged Falere, "You can't let that happen to Rila!"

"The Asari thought the Ardat-Yakshi were to blame for the attack," said Shepard.

"This is our home," said Falere defiantly, "Most of us our grateful to be here. The Monastery is a place where we can achieve peace."

"Falere speaks truthfully," added Samara, "I will vouch for her words with pride."

"Then we need to find that bomb fast," said Shepard.

Falere was shocked, "A bomb? Didn't you come to rescue us?"

"We'll try. But we can't leave this place standing Falere."

"You sound like the Commandos, they didn't stop to help anyone!"

"Falere..." said Samara warningly.

Falere seemed like she didn't know what to do. John held his gun at the ready in case he needed to. Then the young Asari said, "I'm sorry," and ran away.

The small group tried to chase after her, but they were too late, and Falere jumped over the side of a balcony. Using her biotics she gently lowered down to the ground like a leaf, and starting walking towards the great hall.

Samara said, "The Great Hall, she's looking for Rila." Samara did the same as Rila and jumped over the balcony.

"We'll meet up there," said Shepard.

"Shepard, be swift," said Samara, and with that, she ran off as well.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: A lot of people have mentioned the Citadel DLC, and while I think that would be cool, I do not believe I will be doing that. I don't want to give away spoilers, but it will make sense how that won't be appropriate later on.

37. Monastery Part 3

Brothers in Steel Part 36

Monastery Part 3

* * *

><p>The three of them walked into the Great Hall of the Ardat-Yakshi Monastery. It was like a church. At the north end of the hall there was a great window that had a grand view of the rest of the monastery and the snow-capped mountains nearby. Stacks of supplies had been built up, presumably by the Commandos, and a couple of their bodies lay dead and lifeless, cold fingers around cold rifles. John took the left flank and slowly walked to meet up with Shepard, Samara and Falere by a seemingly dead Asari body.<p>

The body came to life however, and Falere said, "Rila? Rila can you hear me?"

Rila's eyes looked dark and glowed, like a Husk's. John made a move to try and stop Falere from touching Rila, but was too late. Falere's sister grabbed a hold of her neck and tried to throttle her. Thankfully, Falere was stronger and pushed Rila to the ground, making her unconscious once again.

"Are you okay?" asked John.

Falere ignored him, "Why did she do that?"

"Because," explained Samara sadly, "They have begun to turn her into one of the Reapers' creatures."

"I'm sorry," said Shepard, "Can we set off that bomb?"

"Not without a detonator," said Liara.

"Commandos would have had one, we got to find it."

Then, John heard the scream of a Banshee from the other side of the room. Then another one appeared, flanked on both sides by two squads of husks.

"We'll deal with this later," said Shepard, pulling out his Avenger Assault Rifle.

The Husks were easily dealt with, John's carnifex splitting them in half down the middle, falling in a puddle of purple and blue luminous goo. But the Banshees were another deal. Their biotic attacks were devastating, sparks and flames were shot up into the air by the impact on electrical and piping systems behind the now-shattered walls. John kept up his firing, but ran out of ammo on his Carnifex pistol.

"I need more Thermal clips!" he yelled over the throng.

"There's a pile on the southwest corner," yelled Shepard back, "I'll cover you."

John scrambled from cover as Shepard's fire blazed over his head, just as a Banshee appeared out of phase jump, and was on his ass.

"Shit," John did a barrel roll, just as the Reaper tried to make a grab with its talon-like fingers.

He got to the thermal clips, picked one up and popped it inside his Carnifex. Ready to go, he fired a shot at the head of the Banshee, and it popped off, rolling on the floor. The Banshee's dead body faded away into nothingness. There was still one more though.

Samara and Falere lent a hand however, firing Warp blasts right on top of the Banshee. Its scream was piercing and brutal, but finally its armor was chiseled down enough for John to charge up at it and unsheathe his omni-blade. The omni-blade rammed itself into the chest of the Banshee, which then promptly died and started to dissolve.

The fight was over.

It was then that Rila woke up again. This time, however, she seemed to be in control of her faculties. She looked much like her sister, but did not have any facial tattoos, and her face was less angular.

"Falere, take the elevator! Go!"

"Rila," Falere said, "What are you doing?"

"Its too late for me," said Rila forlornly, "There are hundreds coming. Just go!"

It was then that John understood what she was about to do. Rila pulled out the detonator for the bomb from a pocket in her regal dress.

Samara nodded, proud of her daughter's sacrifice.

"Move!" yelled Shepard, and John and Liara moved to the elevator. Shepard had to drag Falere however, for she kept trying to claw her way to her sister. Samara held her biotic barrier at the ready, to keep the Banshees that had just entered the room from attacking. They hissed and screeched with malice, ready to attack.

"I love you." said Rila, as Falere tried to fight Shepard.

Just as the Banshees appeared to be approaching Rila, the elevator door closed, and they were on their way back up. The tremor of an explosion sounded out from below and shook the elevator. Falere collapsed to the ground, her spirit broken.

* * *

><p>They arrived up top a few moments later.<p>

Falere walked slowly, still in shock to the edge of the landing pad. "Rila, gone. There wasn't even time to say goodbye!" Her voice was choked up, trying to bite back harsh tears.

"Few can break the Reapers' hold," explained Samara stoically, "Rila's will was extraordinary, as was her love for you."

John understood and admired Rila's sacrifice. It was another unfortunate truth of war, but she did the right thing, the same thing he would have done.

"We left her to die!" yelled Falere accusingly.

"Rila made her choice, and it has reminded me of what is truly important. Why I swore I'd lay down my life."

"What is that?"

"Falere," said Samara gravely, "The code demands that an Ardat-Yakshi cannot live outside a monastery that no longer exists." She pulled out a small Phalank pistol and looked at it.

John's first thought was that Samara was going to kill her daughter. _No!_ He said to himself, _That's not right._

"What are you doing?" asked Shepard, obviously thinking the same as John.

"I'm sorry Shepard," Samara raised the gun to her head, and John understood what was happening, "By the Justicar's code, there is only one way to save Falere."

"Mother, no!"

"My daughters," said Samara regretfully, "You were all so much stronger than I believed."

Samara pulled the trigger.

The round went clean, a little bit of blood splashed on the ground,

and Samara was no more.

"Mother, how could she do this after Rila saved our lives?"

"Falere," said Liara, "This wasn't your fault."

"No, my mother died because of her code. Because I'm an Ardat-Yakshi. Leave me. Leave me with her."

"Are you sure about that," asked Shepard.

"I have no plans of leaving, and I'd never let the Reapers take me alive."

Shepard seemed to be lost in a state of thought, then finally nodded and said, "Alright."

Falere sat there in silence, tending to the body of her now deceased mother. John had no idea why somebody would want to stay on a place that would remind you constantly of all that you had lost; but if Liara and Samara were right; than Falere was dangerous, either as a Reaper or on her own, with temptation at her side.

Shepard called Cortez on the comm, "We're ready for pickup. Just follow the smoke..."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Sorry that was a short one, but there'll be more to come :D Also, I keep getting angry reviews from Guest Users often complaining about my assertion about Mass Effect AI being more advanced than Halo AI. Now, I continue to hold this belief, because when your AI can only exist for seven years without going insane, as opposed to AI being able to create and function in their own independent society, well I think that pretty much says that Mass Effect AI (Geth and Reapers mostly) are more advanced than Halo AI. Of course this is only mine opinion.

38. Calm Before the Storm

****Brothers in Steel Chapter 37****

****Calm Before the Storm****

* * *

><p>John walked into the Starboard Observation room, to find Shepard in there, looking at the stars wistfully, a bottle of liquor hanging haphazardly from his right hand.<p>

"John," said Shepard, "Good to see you. Things...were pretty rough down there. I can't believe Samara's dead."

"Tell me about her. How did you know her from before?"

"She was one of the crew, that helped me stop the Collectors. She was a great warrior, and stood by her convictions. I respected that. She had to take a special oath just to make sure that she wouldn't have

to kill me in case I did something...evil."

"I see. I'm sorry it came to that."

"I am too. You think I should have stopped her?"

John thought about for a minute, looking out into the beyond, "In that case, no."

"Hm. Interesting. I suppose people have to make their own choices, no? Her code was a central part of her life. I had to respect that. But what a waste of life, you know. Especially in this war?"

"Yeah. She could have fought at our side."

Shepard finished off his bottle of blue-liquor and threw it across the room, where it landed perfectly inside a waste receptacle. "What's done is done, though. We have to move forward now. Things are only going to get worse. The war is coming to a head now. I hope you're ready for what's to come."

"I'm always ready, sir."

Shepard laughed slightly, "That reminds me of Jacob."

"Who?"

"Ah, yeah. He was one of the Crew also when I stopped the Collectors. He was a good man. Samara had said the same, but she also said that events would either forge him into becoming a man of great strength, or would ultimately destroy him. In the end, it was the latter that happened."

"What...happened to him? If you don't mind me asking."

Shepard sighed, "We walked down a path over-run by Seeker Swarms inside the Collector Stronghold. They're little nano-bots that resemble bugs. They swarm, carry you off, and mince you like a bunch of piranha. Jacob was holding up a Biotic Barrier to keep them out, but as we got to the end of the corridor, his barrier started to fail. He held it up long enough for me and two others to get through, but then...then he collapsed from exhaustion. The Seeker Swarms picked him up. I can still hear his screams some days, the Seeker Swarms...ripped him to shreds."

John shook his head mournfully, nobody deserved that.

"Well, I better get back to it, John. Thanks for the talk. We're headed to the Citadel, for what might be the last time. If you have something you want to do there, I suggest you do it. I know I will."

Shepard walked off, and John knew immediately what he needed to do.

* * *

><p>John found Liara in her room, working on various activities related to her Information Broker job. Her data feeds were alight with new information streaming in a mile a minute, but she didn't

seem to be too concerned about most of them, just what was in front of her. John knocked on her door and she said , "Come in."<p>

"Hello," said John awkwardly.

Liara smiled, "John, how good to see you. I never got to say thanks for saving me from falling down that elevator shaft, back at the monastery."

"It was nothing," said John. "Can I speak to you for just a moment."

"Glyph," Liara ordered her Monitor-like associate, "Hold all my calls for the moment."

"Of course."

"What do you need to speak to me about?" she asked.

"Well, we're going to the Citadel again..." he began.

"I know."

"And we might not go there for quite some time."

"I also know that."

"So I was wondering...if um...you...would like..." this was painful for John, he had never done this in his entire life, "To go...out...to eat," a short silence followed, "My treat of course."

Liara smiled again, and John felt relieved, "I would love to."

"Oh. Good then. Uh, the only place I know, is that place we went to before when we visited my house so...there?"

"That would be good, but I have a better idea. I'll meet you at your house around seven, and I can show you the way."

The ball was in her court now, "Oh, well. Okay. Sounds good. See you then, tomorrow."

"See you later, John."

* * *

><p>After the Normandy had docked, John took a look at his wardrobe in order to decide what to wear. Unfortunately he owned own two sets of clothes, neither of them very fashionable for a date. So, he decided that the best course was to get some clothes on the Citadel. With Garrus' help, he managed to pick out some: a nice dress shirt and pants. The shirt was blue with a silver stripe down the right side. Then, he went to his Presidium house to wait for Liara.<p>

So far things were quiet, and when five minutes passed after seven, John thought that maybe she had forgotten about it, or was too busy. But then his doorbell rang and he went up to the door.

When he opened the door he found Liara, dressed in a long, elegant, white robe. She also had her face done up a little with purple lipstick that seemed to glitter a little bit. John thought she looked beautiful.

"Uh..." he tried to speak, "Come in, come in."

"Thank you," she said, "My, you're looking sharp tonight."

"Oh well, yes, thank you. So um, where are we going?"

"I rented a skycar. If you are comfortable with me driving you," she chuckled slightly, "Then I can show you where."

"Sure, I can be a passenger for once. The last time I drove a skycar, well I landed in that lake," he pointed to the west, "Do you even know what happened to the Cerberus woman that was in the car?"

They walked out of John's apartment and started walking to the Skycar depot. People were all around hustling and bustling, as the night cycle of the Presidium caused an artificial sunset to peak on the horizon, turning the sky a beautiful rose color. Liara answered him as they got in the skycar, "Actually, I was intrigued by that as well. I did a little search, and found out that she was apprehended by C-Sec, so she survived. She's now in an Alliance Prison, though from what I hear, she was indoctrinated, and can't be reasoned with."

"I thought Cerberus soldiers were rigged up with internal explosives; so if they were captured they couldn't tell anyone anything?"

"Yes, but that only applies to ground troops. Higher-ups and Special Operatives are allowed to have more freedom. Many of the Cerberus soldiers are repurposed colonists from Alliance planets cut-off by the Reapers. Forced into shock troopers."

John grimaced in disgust, "That's no way to treat civilians."

"No, but lets not talk about it, and spoil the evening."

John smiled slightly and said, "Alright."

They got in the Skycar and Liara drove them away from the Presidium, through crowds of cars all the way to Zakera Ward. As if there was no war going on, the vibrant night life of the Citadel remained stable, and people were partying, going to bars, and dancing at open-air nightclubs. In a way it was somewhat sad, but that's exactly what he and Liara were doing, so he shook it off. Liara parked them at the very top of Zakera ward, in a Skycar Depot. All around this sector though was lush vegetation, and John realized that they had parked right next to a municipal garden.

"Where are we?" John asked.

"Armali Council Gardens. There's a restaurant inside. This is one of my favorite places on the Citadel, because it reminds me of where I grew up."

"Ah, I see. Do you want to look around first then?"

"Well, if its not too much trouble," she said slyly.

They went at a slow pace, admiring the shrubbery and topiary arrangements. John smelled many different scents, some citrus, some pungent and bitter, and there were hundreds of flowers of all kinds of flashy colors, red, white, blue, orange and countless more. In the center of the Garden was a statue of an Asari wearing a strange pointed headdress. John pointed at it and said, "Who's that?"

"That...that was my mother, John."

"Was? What happened to her?"

"She's dead. She died a few years ago. I was there when it happened."

"I see. Does the war make you miss her?"

"A little bit. I recently got into contact with my father. I know that you don't have much attachment to this universe, you've only been here a short while. But, everything seems to be pushing to an end. Either we win, or we all die. Its black and white, at this point. And I just want to get closure, you know."

"I understand. I never knew my mother. Well, much anyway."

"I know. I saw, remember?"

"Oh yeah."

"Its really all a miracle that you're even here isn't it? You just happened to drop here out of chance? Tell me, do you believe in anyone, anything, as in a Greater Power?"

It was an odd question, "I don't know. It never was important. Before, when I was made a Spartan," he tried to explain.

"I see. But I think you being here, proves that there is something more than what we know. That maybe there really is a great plan behind everything. Otherwise, you think it was just random chance that got you in a wormhole, to help us at our hour of greatest need?"

"You saying I have a destiny? That I was meant to help Shepard stop the Reapers?"

"Yes. That's exactly what I'm saying."

"The Female Krogan, Eve, thought that too," pondered John, "So I don't know. But I have a job now, and that's all that matters."

Liara laughed, then she slowly stroked John's arm, "I'm glad you're here though."

Instinctively, John pulled back, he wasn't used to people touching him, but then he realized he had done something wrong and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. That was a reflex."

Liara had a look of hurt on her face, "No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that, I was pushing too soon."

John put his hand in Liara's, "No. You weren't."

Liara smiled. A few minutes passed by, then John said, "So...should we get something to eat now?"

* * *

><p>The restaurant was in a large, circular building, like an arena, with a ring corridor around the perimeter, and inside were flat-top tables. In the exact middle was a cylindrical aquarium, where beautiful Illium Skald Fish and Kahje jellyfish were swimming gracefully midst decorative sea weed and gravel. They got a seat at the high bar, (at Liara's request to get in on the Mongolian Barbecue). They talked and even laughed a little and altogether, John was having the greatest time in his life that didn't involve killing something.<p>

After they had eaten, Liara said, "I am going to quickly go use the restroom. I will be back soon."

"Alright, I'll be here."

John waited in silence, but then a voice from behind him said, "I know you. John Spartan, of the SSV _Normandy_."

John turned to his right, to see a man with a widow's peak, combed brown hair, and a hard-lined face next to him. He wore a suit and was sipping a green drink. His voice seemed ominous, hinting at knowledge known only to him. But the most disturbing characteristic was that his eyes seemed to glow with a blue light. He made John uneasy.

"Do I...know you?" asked John warily.

"You should. I extended an invitation for you to join my organization, John."

John thought back, then realized that the voice was indeed familiar. And then...it struck him.

"You're the Illusive Man."

The Illusive Man smiled and put a finger to his lips, in a mock "shhh" gesture. "That will be our little secret. For now, you can call me Jack."

"What do you want?"

"To give you a second chance. I realized how foolish it was of me to expect that you would be willing to join me so openly when you were being watched by Shepard and his loyal crew. So now, I am here, willing to let you come with me, and do some real good for the galaxy."

John shook his head, "I know your type. Thinking you're doing good, when really all you want is control."

The Illusive Man laughed and said, "Actually, I do want Control. But

not control of the galaxy, or the human race, or even a single planet. No, I want to Control the Reapers."

"That's insane," said John, "How would you be able to do that?"

"You know the Crucible of course? Or did you just sign up for the service without knowing the end plan of this all?"

"I know enough," said John. All he knew was that the Crucible was the weapon that needed the Alliance's Shepard was working on building to work. Besides that, all he needed to know was who to shoot.

"Then you probably don't know that I...have almost found a way to use the Crucible to not merely destroy the Reapers but to control them. You've seen firsthand their power. That power could be harnessed, controlled, and used to benefit humanity. Surely, you are not as idealistic as the Commander."

John bit his lip. The man was truly a villain, but Control did seem very beneficial. The Reapers would put an end to all wars, would allow for the rebuilding process to be better. But there was no proof that he could do any of this. "You expect me to just take your good word?"

"No, of course not. But I can show you. There is a place where agents of mine have been working experiments on Husks. They have found a way to control them; there, we can use what we learn and apply it to the Crucible. Though we need the Crucible and its power source, the Catalyst, first, and that we must take."

John thought some more, then asked, "How are you even here? Aren't you worried you'll be seen and caught?"

"Hardly," the Illusive Man replied haughtily, "The man I was, he is dead. The Alliance does not know my face anymore, and certain augmentations keep it that way. I am an enigma. A ghost. So what will it be? Will you stand with Shepard and don a doomed cause? Or will you join with me, and see what true power is?"

John looked to see Liara coming out of the bathroom and on her way. And that made his choice clear.

"I won't deny, controlling the Reapers would be good. But you are responsible for the deaths of innocents, you have forced people to contribute to your foolish side-war. If you really cared about helping stop the Reapers, you would use your resources to help the Alliance, not fight them at every turn. No. I will not fight with you, a coward who hides in the shadows. If you really want to help, you should turn yourself in."

The Illusive Man sighed, "It seems Shepard's naivete has rubbed off on you. No matter, soon, you will learn the error of your ways. I bid you farewell," the Illusive Man rose from his seat and spoke as he walked away, "Enjoy the rest of your evening."

John watched him go. Liara joined up with him and said, "Sorry, there was a line. Are you alright? You look like you've seen a ghost?"

John looked at her and forced a smile to reassure her, "It's ok. I was

just thinking about something. Lets enjoy the evening. We might not have the chance for a while."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: That was a fun chapter.

**Anyways, now we go into the "Ending Phase" as I like to call it. This is made up of three parts that will ultimately lead up to hopefully a better ending for Mass Effect 3. The First Phase is Thessia. The Second Phase is Dealing with the Flood. And the Third Phase is the Cerberus Base and Earth. Each scenario will result in completely different situations from what happened in the canonical game. Prepare for plot twists, characters you haven't seen before as squad-mates, new technology, new battle strategies, and a new resolution with the Catalyst. So far, most of the story has been merely John going along for the ride; but that all changes now. I doubt I will make everybody happy (I know I will not make everybody happy) but this is it, the ideas that were the reason I wrote this fic. **

39. Apocalypse Part 1

Brothers in Steel Chapter 38

Apocalypse Part 1

* * *

><p>The noise of anti-aircraft guns crackled in the distance. John was loading a thermal clip into his Avenger assault rifle, locking it in place with a pop. The shuttle shook every few seconds, and John was watching Liara, who in turn was watching the devastation of her homeworld. Their next mission had taken them to the planet Thessia, a planet John had learned was Liara's homeworld, prompting John to come on this mission of his own accord. From the Kodiak's window, John could see the devastation of Thessia unfolding before his very eyes. Reapers had flown in from the planet; two kilometers in height, they were ravaging the cities on Thessia's surface, their lasers cutting through buildings like a knife through butter, only with far more devastating consequences, explosions erupting in the mayhem below.<p>

"What else do you know about this artifact, Liara?" asked Shepard.

"These coordinates the Councilor gave you are for the temple of Athame," explained Liara, "My mother took me there once. Its Several thousand years old. And," she added, "It has classified government funding."

"Sounds suspicious," said John.

"What if we're too late? My people are dying down there."

"We can't ignore that people are dying," agreed Shepard, "The Reapers may not have mercy, but we do."

John said nothing, but in his head he knew that was what gave the Reapers more power over them. But he didn't feel like that it would be right so say so at that time.

The shuttle touched down in the middle of a warzone. Rubble was strewn about everywhere, and a small group of Asari Commandos were trying to hold off a position in very small numbers. Bodies were covered with red tarps and laid out, showing that the casualties were indeed high. Fires were spreading behind the positions, and the Asari Commandos were struggling to keep a wave of Husks and Brutes from breaking a violet Biotic barrier in the middle of their lines.

"This can't be happening," said Liara in a state of shock, "My home..."

John put a hand on Liara's shoulder and said sympathetically, "I'm here to help. We got to move though."

"Lets get down!" yelled Shepard. They jumped off the Kodiak into the war zone, and jogged towards the Asari troops nearby.

"You must be Commander Shepard!" yelled an Asari Commando, obviously in charge, "I'm Lieutenant Kurin. We heard..."

She was interrupted by a buffeting explosion from behind. John felt a prickle of heat and his shields rippled in reaction to it. The nearby barrier made up of patchwork steel and biotics had been brought down, and a dead Asari lay on the ground, her body burned black like a charcoal briquette.

"The Barriers been breached!" yelled Lieutenant Kurin, "Commander, we'll talk later. Get on the gun and do some damage!"

Shepard ran to a mounted gun and started laying down rounds on the field. John got to the right flank and provided support with his Avenger. Two Brutes moved sluggishly on the bridge surrounded by a group of nimble Husks. Shepard made short work of all of them with the gun, which shredded through them and turned the husks into piles of purple goop and cybernetics.

It took a few minutes, but the Reaper wave was stopped, giving the Asari time to rebuild and regroup. Lieutenant Kurin pulled Shepard, John and Liara aside from the front line and told them hurriedly, "We've been told to expect you. Our orders were to hold this grid at all costs. But the perimeter's collapsing, and I'm getting my people out of here."

Shepard followed her as she began to leave, "This is important, we need your help."

"Well unless you give me a good reason to stay, we're not dying for a field of rubble!"

"What exactly were you told about me?"

"Nothing but your name. Mission details were classified. Just means we'll die without knowing why."

"I know what that's like," Shepard tried to explain, "But you have to trust the chain of command."

"We're not even sure the chain still exists, so what are we doing here?"

"We're after a relic inside the temple. Its important to defeating the Reapers."

"That's what this is about?" said the Lieutenant annoyed, "One of our outposts was trying to get in touch with the scientists there, but we lost contact."

Nearby a mantis Gunship was being prepped for lift off. It was an odd looking vehicle, with a very narrow cockpit and chassis, with one set of wings bisecting the middle, underneath that, missile launchers. Underneath the cockpit was a turret of some sort, barrels still hot from use. Kurin called out to the pilot and said, "Get that gunship in the air now!" It took off and went off to go join the war for dominance of the air.

Kurin then said, "I'm sorry Commander, If your relic has lasted this long, then it can wait a little longer. I've lost a lot of people today. I'm pulling the rest of them out."

"No," said Liara sternly, "If you don't help us get to that temple, then this will be the last you ever see of Thessia. You're witnessing the extinction of our entire race. This is the end."

Kurin was taken aback. After a few minutes of silence, she asked, "Do you really think you can stop all that from happening?"

"We're building a Prothean Superweapon," added Shepard, "It will win this war."

"Prothean huh? How do you know it will finish the job?"

"Its the only chance any of us got."

Gravely, the Lieutenant nodded and activated her comm, calling out to all the troops under her command at the perimeter defense, "This is Lieutenant Kurin. I want all positions locked down a path carved to the temple. Outpost Tykis, we got people coming your way," she got off the communicator and then yelled to her troops, "Lets make sure the galaxy knows the war was won on Thessia!"

The Lieutenant ordered her troops to open up the barrier, and the three of them stepped onto the bridge. John readied himself, it was going to be a tough fight.

* * *

><p>Shepard's omni-tool lit up orange in order to bypass through a locked door. Immediately as they exited through the portal, the blare of a Reaper above deafened their ears. They had just gotten through about half a kilometer of Reaper forces, and now, it looked like they were too late. The Reapers were at the temple in force.<p>

"That's a lot bigger than what we faced on Rannoch," said John, fully realizing the power the Reapers possessed. The Reaper in front of him was a behemoth that towered over the nearest skyscrapers, its tentacle-like arms crashing through rubble like a kid through sand.

Pillars of smoke were everywhere, and the Reaper's laser was bringing down gunships like flies. The ground shook with each movement it made.

"Look over there!" shouted Shepard over the fray,
"Snipers!"

"They're Asari, we need to reach them," said Liara.

The three of them mantled over the ruined battlefield, pieces of debris and glass falling from the sky as the Reaper made its way past them. Fire from Batarian Cannibals streamed in from the northeast, forcing John to take cover behind some ruined gardens, the vegetation within burned to a crisp. They climbed up the side of a building, and made contact with the Asari sniper. A grouping of shots whizzed by John's head in a flash of orange and red. "Watch your head!" yelled the Asari sniper.

"How long can you hold out?" yelled Shepard, as John and Liara began laying down suppressing fire.

"Now that you're here, as long as it takes! Here, take this!"

She threw a large, bulky sniper rifle to Shepard, who then threw it to John. It had a long scope on the top, and a square shaped muzzle reducer at the end of the lengthy barrel. John took it and immediately set his sights on one of the Cannibals. He pulled the trigger, and the kick of the gun was substantial, though his Spartan strength allowed him to control it with ease. The Cannibal's head erupted in a fountain of gore, and he quickly changed targets to another one nearby.

"You think you can really win this war?" asked the Asari sniper between shots.

"We get to that temple, the Reapers are history!"

"Alright then."

John hoped that he was right.

They beat back the next two waves of Reaper forces, and soon enough, the big ship-sized one was out of sight, heading over to the coastline of the nearby blue and purple lake. The sniper said, "Outpost Tykis isn't far, I can cover you!"

John dropped down to the ground. The smell of burnt ozone was everywhere, as was smoke and debris from the wreckage. Liara coughed as they passed through a burning building, and then made their way through a sizable hole that the Reaper had made. Shattered glass cracked under John's boots until he came to a stop, over looking what seemed to be a large series of steps. Towards the top, two Asari were trying to keep what seemed like thirty Batarian Cannibals and Turian Marauders at bay.

A flare of light appeared in the distance, and the sound of an explosion followed by a Reaper's blare came next. "This nightmare never ends," Liara said ruefully.

"The hell it won't," said Shepard irritably, probably tired of

Liara's whining, as if he hadn't lived through the same thing, "We get to that artifact, and we can all wake up."

They all made their way up the steps, and watched as one of the Asari was shot down, and the other knocked to her feet by a resounding explosion. The Asari scrambled to pick up her shotgun as fire rained down from above. John and Liara slid into cover next to each other, and Shepard came up on the right, firing his assault rifle at the Reapers.

"Where's Outpost Tykis?" asked Shepard.

"You're looking at it!" said the Asari, who then peeked out of cover to lay down a few shots from her shotgun.

"What about the rest of your squad?"

"They're all dead. We tried punching through to the scientists...but I'm all that's left," she said regretfully.

"What about reinforcements?"

"We had gunships flying support, but things got too hot with that Reaper, they can't chance it."

"I know its rough," said Shepard, "But we can't get in without their help."

The Asari nodded and put a finger to her communicator and said, "Talon Swarm, this is Outpost Tykis, is there anybody left on this frequency? We are in need of immediate air support. Commander Shepard is here."

A voice replied, "Copy, this is Talon 4, we're on the way!"

Another joined in, "Talon 5 inbound."

Two gunships flew in over head, deafening the noise of gunfire. The Reaper forces stopped for a moment, and then were completely cut in the strafe run of the gunships' blazing weapons. The guns' sounded like a drill, and they completely bowled over the two waves of Reaper forces above John, slicing them up into nothing more than meat and cybernetics.

A nearby Ravager fired a red pulse of energy at Talon 4, and an explosion erupted from within its starboard wing. The gunship spiraled out of control, leaving a trail of smoke behind it, falling onto the battlefield. It took a few husks with it, however.

The remaining gunship made a pass around them and said, "Whatever you're doing, you better do it now. More Reaper troops inbound as we speak."

"Go Commander!" said the last Asari of Outpost Tykis, "I'll cover you from here!" She mantled up behind some cover, and starting firing her shotgun at a new group of Reapers emerging from the rubble and chaos leading up to the temple.

John led the team up the rubble, skirting around the edges of the Reaper forces. With his hand cannon, John shot wildly into them,

taking a few out, but mostly keeping them on their toes. They ran past the few Reapers with ease, but were stopped when John saw two ravagers at the end of a long walkway.

The Ravagers let loose with fire, and John dived for cover. As he landed on his back, he saw the blaze of the Ravager turrets above his head, flashing red and yellow. Then the blare of a Reaper sounded, and he saw the Reaper from before returning. "We got to move!" yelled Shepard. John forced himself out of cover, his shields being hit left and right, but holding for now, until he was able to get to better cover, a piece of dry wall broken off the buildings above.

"We got company!" yelled Talon 5, as a great Harvester appeared, a insectoid like monster with gleaming blue eyes and leathery, bat-like wings. It let out a piercing roar and fired a glob of energy at the gunship, but thankfully, Talon 5 managed to dodge, but bugged out. Another Harvester landed in front of John and the team, and started its assault on them as well. Forced on his belly, John started to crawl up to get to a better position to fire.

A huge explosion deafened John's hearing, and everything turned white for a moment, until he realized that an engine of some sort from a burned out car had exploded. He staggered to his feet, and saw Liara surrounded by Husks on all sides, and Shepard was pinned down by the Harvester.

It was that moment that Talon 5 decided to make a reappearance, coming in sideways, firing a barrage of missiles at the Harvester. The Harvester roared in anger but then exploded in a flare of red and purple, the rest of its body dissolving to ash, similar to a Banshee. Relieved John activated his omni-blade and sliced it through the bodies of the Husks, ending his spree with a quick decapitation. The Husk head rolled onto the floor in a pool of offal, and Liara was sweaty and panting from fear.

"Oh no," said Talon 5's pilot groaned, "I just took damage to my shields!"

A group of Ravagers so far unseen by John were now firing at the gunship, and it exploded, pieces of its cockpit and chassis raining across the battlefield. John grimaced but stayed calm as he and Shepard took out the remaining Ravagers. Finally, the first time in two hours, silence appeared.

"All this sacrifice," said Liara ruefully, "We have to make it worth something!"

40. Apocalypse Part 2

****Brothers in Steel Chapter 39****

****Apocalypse: Part 2****

* * *

><p>The entrance to the interior of the temple was shielded by a blue kinetic barrier. It took a few seconds for Liara to access a nearby terminal, and shut it down. As soon as it was down, they went inside, and entered what seemed like something out of another time.<p>

The Temple of Athame was like a church. It was a long hall, where on either side of the aisle, were sets of stone pews. The lighting of the room was very dim, with only small shafts of faded white light falling down onto the carpeted floor. At the very end of the hall was an immense statue made of white marble, decorated in fine detail. It displayed an Asari in long, flowing robes, looking regal in its image. Shepard led them down the hall at a quick pace, as time was running out quickly for them.

"Hello?" asked Liara, her voice echoing through the room, "Is anyone there?"

There was no answer but silence. John felt uneasy.

"Take a look around," ordered Shepard, "Maybe one of these artifacts is what we're looking for."

They did a sweep of the room. John went up towards the statue and saw two dead Asari on the ground, lying in a pool of their own blood, dressed in white, full body singlets. "Looks like I found the scientists," said John grimly.

John went up for a closer inspection then noticed something strong, "Their throats."

Shepard asked, "What happened to them?"

"They've been slit," said Liara, "The Reapers didn't do this."

"Strange."

"We're going to have to figure this one on our own."

Shepard looked up at the great statue and said, "Who's that?"

"The goddess Athame herself," answered Liara, "A relic of the old faith."

"Seems odd they would build such a monument if the religion is dying," noted John.

"I will admit this seems rather elaborate, even by our standards. Though Athame has great historical significance, we once believed our gods lived separate from the world...looking down on us."

"Wait..." said Shepard, putting out a hand to touch the base of the sculpture. Then his eyes shot up and he turned, "There's a Prothean Beacon here!"

"What?" said Liara, unbelieving, "You're sure?"

"What is here?" asked John.

"No time to explain," said Shepard, "But it's not something you forget."

"Why hide it then?" asked Liara.

"The Beacons hold information Liara, the Asari must have covered it up to keep it from the rest of the galaxy."

"That...can't be, I can't believe my people would keep this a secret."

"A beacon like this would explain why the Asari are more advanced than we are."

"That doesn't mean its true!"

"Yeah, but think about it, a technological breakthrough every so hundred years, and your people keep themselves running the galaxy."

John was a little confused, but decided to forget about it for now. Whatever was in the statue, it was something that had information, the information to destroy the Reapers. And that was all he needed to know.

"They probably should have shared that information," said John, "Otherwise we might have been more prepared for this."

"We don't know that for sure!" Liara was getting desperate now.

"What we do know is we don't have much time," said Shepard somewhat irritably.

Liara walked up the a console underneath the statue and pulled out her omni-tool, "The few records I can get, talking about tapping into Prothean data streams, reconstructing matrices, none of which I see here."

"Maybe that's the point," said Shepard, walking over to a slab of stone with strange primitive drawings on them, and when he did, a beam of green light shot out from the artifact. Cracks appeared on the statue, and from them poured more of the green light.

"By the goddess," Liara said, "Literally."

"Look around, there must be more of these connections."

"Incredible, the Beacon seems to think you're Prothean, Shepard! It must be the cipher you got on Feros all those years ago."

John couldn't help but drawing a parallel with the relationship with the Protheans and the Forerunners. Both left technology for the races to find, and both seemed to be impacting the fates of them as well.

Shepard led them around the room. He put his hand out when passing artifacts. All of them looked ancient, some of them were slabs of stone like the first mural, with more hieroglyphics on them. Others were old weapons, a rusted sword or a shield, and there were a few strange looking busts depicting wise looking sages, the weird part though was that they all had four eyes. Most of them didn't react, but every so often green light would spill forth from them and shoot towards the Statue. Then the statue would crack even further and reveal more green light. Eventually, after getting three more

connections points, the status completely split away, pieces of it falling onto the ground and crashing into dust. What it left behind was stunning.

It was a strange flat rectangle, the color green, with a bright neon green stripe running down the vertical side of it. It glowed with an intensity that forced John's MJOLNIR armor to shade his optics.

"That did it," said Liara, "I think we can access the Beacon now."

Shepard went up to a console and then out of the Prothean Beacon, a ball of glowing green light floated down to them. It had bars and strange dashes circling it, making it seem alive somehow.

"Obtaining chronological marker, hold," said a voice coming from the sphere, "Timescale established. Post-Prothean cycle confirmed."

"What are you?" asked Shepard.

The sphere rose high up and ignored Shepard's query, "Reaper presence detected, this cycle has already reached its extinction time. Systems shutting down."

"Not so fast," said John.

"We need answers!" barked Shepard.

"To what question?" replied the Sphere.

"The Catalyst," said Shepard, "We need to know what it is to finish the Crucible."

The Sphere stepped back and then started to shift, growing taller and wider, until it was no longer a sphere and a representation of a strange alien. Immediately, John saw a strange resemblance to what he had seen moments before, "Hey, that's like the statues."

"Is that?" said Liara unbelieving, "A Prothean?"

"I am the memory of one," the Prothean explained, flashing green and blue every second, "I am called Vendetta, an advanced Virtual Construct of Pashrek Vran, overseer of the project you refer to as Crucible. He died fighting the Reapers in the battle of Tranbia Nine. Your remaining time is also at an end."

"What happened to the Crucible in your time? Why didn't the Protheans deploy it?" John wanted to know the answer to that as well, and to what the Catalyst was. He obviously wasn't being told everything about this superweapon Shepard was building.

"We were sabotaged from within, a splinter group argued that we should dominate the Reapers, not destroy them. It fractured our order of battle. Later, we discovered that the Separatists were indoctrinated."

"The Illusive Man," said John.

"After these battles, we realized that time is cyclical, many patterns repeat."

"Like the Reaper attacks," added Shepard.

"And beyond. The same peaks of evolution, the same valleys of dissolution. The same conflicts are expressed in every cycle, but in a different manner. The repetition is too prevalent to be merely chance."

"We assumed the Reapers were responsible for the pattern," said Liara.

"Perhaps, but I believe that the Reapers are only servants of the pattern, not its master."

"So who is the master?" asked Shepard.

"Unknown, its presence is inferred, not observed. The only certainty is its intention. Galactic annihilation. You now stand at that precipice."

Even this was a little startling to John, he could imagine what it was like for Liara and Shepard, who had believed that they were alone in this galaxy, and that they controlled their fates.

"There's still hope for this cycle," argued Shepard strongly, "We can still find the Catalyst. Trillions of lives are at risk!"

"Trillions of lives are always at risk. But if the Reapers have already arrived, then this discussion is too late."

"We can break the cycle! We found your plans for the Crucible, we're building it right now!"

"The Crucible is not of Prothean design," explained Vendetta, "It is the work of countless galactic cycles stretching back millions of years. Each cycle adds to it, each cycle improves upon it. Thus far, no one has successfully defeated the Reapers with it."

"Then we'll be the first, tell us what the Catalyst is."

"If you wish to continue fighting, I will not hinder you. Though I deem your chance of success remote."

"We'll take our chances."

"Very well...Indoctrinated Presence detected. Activating security protocol."

Vendetta reverted back to a Sphere form and flew away, absorbed by the Prothean Beacon. John heard the noise of a Gunship touching down behind him, and looked to see a shining bright light obstructing his vision. From within the light, a figure emerged, and John was surprised by who it was; the Cerberus Swordsman from the Citadel Coup. The one he had defeated and forced to retreat.

"Here for another beating?" asked John.

When the Cerberus Swordsman saw John he backed up for a moment, and a

flicker of fear passed through his eyes but then he moved in.

Shepard asked, "You, what do you want?"

"Your attention," said the Swordsman. He brought out a strange looking ball, crisscrossed by squares of glowing blue light, and let it fly out towards the team. It stopped in mid-air, and then a ripple of light emerged, and a hologram of the Illusive Man appeared. All he said was, "Shepard."

"How did you find this place?" asked Shepard.

"The Archives," answered the Illusive Man dryly, "Or did your Shadow Broker miss that one?"

"Show yourself!" said Liara, "I promise I won't miss."

"Stick to your talents, T'soni," said the Illusive Man patronizingly as he walked through Shepard and approached the Beacon, "You've discovered the key to subjugating the Reaper threat."

"Or destroying them."

"Dammit Shepard, destroying the Reapers gains us nothing."

"How about peace?"

"They're just trying to control us, think about it. If they wanted all Organic life destroyed, they could do it. There would be nothing left."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I know them Shepard, I know how they think."

"I think you've gotten a little too close to the enemy!"

"No, I'm saying they've got it right. Why kill when you can control?"

Secretly, John could not deny the logic he was hearing, but remained silent.

"You're being indoctrinated," spat Shepard.

"No, I just...see things differently," the Illusive Man didn't sound like he was so sure of himself anymore.

"If you truly care about humanity, you'll stop fighting me. You'll join me."

"Don't question my intentions, I've sacrificed more for humanity than you'll ever know. And don't assume you know me. My methods for dealing with the Reapers are simply more refined than yours."

Shepard shook his head and said ruefully, "You spat on everything we fought for once. You were supposed to protect humanity! You were supposed to be our sword, not the dagger in our back!"

"Poetic, but as usual, you miss the point. The world is more gray than you care to admit."

"You're either with me, or you're against me, there's nothing gray about that."

"No..." the Illusive Man walked away and back into his ball, "I suppose there isn't. Leng," he said to the swordsman, "The Commander has something I need. Relieve him of it. Then get that data."

"With pleasure," said Leng with a smile. The Illusive Man disappeared. Leng ran at Liara, and shoved her out of the way with a might heave. Liara crashed into John, who was knocked off balance for a moment and onto the ground. He got back up and watched as Shepard began firing his weapon at Leng. Leng's shields completely absorbed, they appeared pretty damn advanced. Leng put a finger up to his communicator and said, "Target the supports."

John had barely a second to look up when four missiles came from the blinding light and fired into the supports around. Huge pieces of foundation rained on him and Liara and John was crushed by the weight. Immediately he began to push them off him, but more kept coming down. He couldn't see anything, darkness was everywhere, until finally it stopped. John ripped off all the rubble off him. If he could flip over a Scorpion Tank, he could sure as hell handle this. He came out and saw Liara, somewhat wounded, on the ground. He couldn't see Shepard anywhere, but then he heard a grunt from nearby and ran towards it.

John came over to the edge and looked down into a dark abyss, hundreds of meters deep. Over at the end of the hall the gunship was taking off. Climbing up a piece of rubble that was hanging precariously from the main archway, was Shepard, trying to heave himself up. John put out his hand but Shepard couldn't reach it just yet.

"Commander!" said John, "Grab my hand."

"Trying.." a sudden crack silenced them both. Ripples and cracks appeared all over the broken piece of rubble and Shepard looked down, his forehead soaked in sweat. He gave John one last, sad glance and then said sadly, "John. Watch over Tali for me."

"What..." began John, but it was too late. The rubble completely removed itself and fell to the ground, taking Shepard with it.

Silence followed. John's hand was still outstretched, but he had failed. Liara was crying somewhere in the distance. The sound of dying Asari on the comm could be heard, but the world had stopped.

It was now all on him.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: For those of you that had been wanting me to do the Citadel DLC, and wondered why I wouldn't. Well. That is why. Yep.

41. Command

****Brothers In Steel Part 40****

****Command****

* * *

><p>He was standing on one end of a hall. The floors were made of slick chrome that shined in the radiant sun that floated above's glare, and the sides of the wall were made of gray-colored metal, with large holes placed every five feet or so. John saw at the end of the hall, a figure approaching, a Sangheilli figure, wearing dark black armor, an energy sword in each hand. It was Thel Vadam, the Arbiter, a person that had once fought at John's side in the home universe.<p>

Thel walked up to John and sniffed him. The he spoke, his voice heavy and grim, "It has been some time, Spartan."

"Where am I?" asked John, as the two began to walk down the hallway, approaching a portal filled with white, blinding light.

"A dream, nothing more, but with luck, it might give you some needed inspiration."

"Inspiration?"

"Yes. Let us walk through a hall of heroes."

They entered the light and walked into a new world. They were outdoors, on some world where fire rained down from the sky. It was a world John had been before, Venezia he thought it was, a world where the Covenant had glassed the populace mercilessly. Six CCS battle cruisers flew menacingly in the night sky, the purple outlines of their hulls glimmering in the moonlight and fading through the clouds like great whales. Their fire was raining on the ground in splashes of red and orange.

But on the ground, brave men and women of the UNSC were fighting against hordes of Sangheilli and Unggoy soldiers, refusing to pull out. Plasma fire zipped by over their heads in flashes of blue and green. The air smelled burnt and the crack of gunfire from the UNSC side was relentless. It was a full blown war zone, as the UNSC tried to hold onto what little cover they could, pieces of rubble blown away bit by bit. Corpses ripped apart limb from limb, were strewn about everywhere.

"Where are we?" asked John again.

"A battle during our own war. Your UNSC fought to the last man, and showed great honor. Heroes fight even when they know they will lose. To be ready for command, you must know that your new allies doubt your resolve. You must steel your will, and be ready for whatever comes. You must be willing to die."

"I always have," retorted John.

"In where you came from. But without Liara, you would still see this as little more as a game to keep you with a purpose. To truly lead these men and women, you must have the same devotion as they do, you must feel...fear."

"Easier said than done."

"A strange problem is it not? Let us move on, there is more to see."

They walked across the battlefield, the combatants ignoring them. They were like ghosts. And then they entered a new portal.

Now they were somewhere else, in a world less familiar, a world of sweeping amber plains. John saw a troop of battered soldiers in tattered armor, wearing bloody rags on their foreheads and arms, walking away from a burned out village, where smokestacks were rising in the distance. The soldiers were medieval, their weapons swords and pikes, and some were riding atop great horses.

"Where are we now?"

"A battle in your ancient past, both your old home, and your new one. Many times before you left Earth, you fought amongst yourself over everything available. As you can see, this led to suffering. If you are to lead, you must unite all those that follow you, or else you will divide and fight amongst yourself."

John watched as some of the men struggled to move, and one collapsed to the ground. But his allies did nothing, and left him to die out in the field. Crows and vultures hovered in the air, waiting to pick the flesh off of these cadavers.

"I guess they didn't believe in 'no man left behind'," said John.

"No, they had no honor. But it is easy to revert back to your primitive state. Come, there is one more place for you to go."

They left the trail of wounded soldiers and passed once more through a portal. Now they were in some kind of prison camp. Herds of ragged, dirty people were being led through a gate connected by barbed fences. Men, women, and children were all crying as they slowly moved in a grim procession. On towers that overlooked the camp and the people, were men in full uniform, gray uniforms with pointed helmets. On their lapels, they wore a symbol that John had seen before in history textbooks. It was the Swastika, the symbol of Nazi Oppression during the Second World War. He was in a Concentration Camp.

"Wait, I know this place," said John, "This is a Nazi Concentration Camp, during the Second World War."

"Yes. This is your final lesson. Beware the ones who advise Control. Beware those who believe what they are doing is for the 'greater good.' There is a greater good, but it will never be achieved through dictatorship, through control of others, through domination. Good will be only achieved through good actions. Remember these lessons, Spartan, and you may yet be able to lead your new comrades to victory."

Thel walked off into the distance, and slowly everything faded into a dull white.

* * *

><p>"John?" a voice woke him from his slumber, "John?"<p>

"I'm here," said John, waking up instantly, no amount of lethargy within him, "What do you need, Traynor?"

Traynor had entered the room, and was holding a datapad in her hand, she answered John as she read it, "Admiral Hackett is on the Primary QEC. He wants to speak to you."

"Alright, I'm on it."

John already knew what this was about. Things had been static since Shepard had been confirmed MIA. Joker had forwarded a report to Hackett, but there had been no answer until now, and two days had passed. In the meantime, they were floating around aimlessly in the Raheel-Leyya system. When the news had hit, most of the crew had refused to believe it, but then had sunk down into the depths of an all absorbing depression. Liara had not left her room, as it had not been enough that Shepard had died, but also her entire people. It was said from some of the Engineers that Tali wept almost constantly, and went down into the space underneath Engineering to hide out. Garrus was almost always drunk now. James and Cortez seemed to be able to keep their cool, though James himself admitted that they had little chance. Lastly, Joker himself had cried once and cursed the Reapers, but seemed to be acting professionally for the moment. John was going to have to wake them out of their stupor, if he really did have to lead them.

John walked into the comms room and looked at the date: June 21st, 2186. The months had seemed to pass by during this service. John activated the communicator and stood at attention. The blue representation of Admiral Hackett appeared and John saluted, receiving a salute back. Admiral Hackett said, "Alright, lets get right to the point, what exactly happened down on Thessia?"

"Commander Shepard led our team down to the planet. We were headed to the Asari Temple of Athame in the city of Armali. Shepard was looking for something to do with the Crucible, I don't know what, that intel was never shared with me. As we approached we encountered heavy Reaper resistance. The Reapers were attacking Thessia en masse, and they didn't stand a chance."

"I see," said Admiral Hackett, frowning. Then he said, "Alright, so how did Cerberus get involved?"

"They were already there, waiting for Shepard to activate the...whatever it was. After we talked to it, their Assassin..."

"Kai Leng."

"Kai Leng, he appeared and started firing at us with a gunship. We were hopelessly outgunned at the moment. In the end, Shepard fell to his death in the Temple."

The Admiral sighed, and said nothing for a few moments. Then he said, "I'm not going to lie, Lieutenant, but this might be the nail in our coffin. Without Shepard, much of the hope we give the other species is going to be gone. That is why I am not telling anyone that Shepard is dead, not until this Crucible is finished? You understand that?"

"Completely, sir."

"Good, in the meantime, until that happens, I'm handing over the Normandy to you. Shepard promoted you for a reason. Your actions on the Citadel saved the Council's lives, and therefore he trusted you. That's good enough for me, until we can find a new Commander to take over. In the mean time, it looks like you have only one option."

John knew what that was, "Find where Cerberus is keeping the intel, and take it back."

"Roger that. Hackett out."

Hackett disappeared and faded away. Then John walked back into the war room and said, "EDI, gather everybody up in the war room now."

"Yes, Commander."

"You heard?"

"I hear everything, Commander."

"Just call me John for now, ok? It feels weird."

"Yes, John."

* * *

><p>Everyone gathered in the war room. They all looked up at John as he started walking down. John cleared his throat and said, "Alright, we have a plan now. We have to go after Cerberus."<p>

"How the hell are we supposed to do that?" said Garrus.

John was about to ask Liara, but then he saw Traynor shuffle uncomfortably and raise her hand, "Yes, Traynor?"

"Well, while you were down on the planet, I scanned a Cerberus ship leaving the planet. That was probably Kai Leng's ship, now that we know about it. I planted a trace on his ship, and followed it to the Shadow Sea, in the Iera system, and then it just disappears. As if something was jamming the signal."

"That's suspicious," said John, "But is that our only lead?"

"For the moment, yes," said Liara, her voice still heavy with shame and sadness, "The war has made me lost contact with over 75% of my agents, the rest are in no position to get intel on Cerberus. I think we need to track this lead, see if it follows up on anything."

"Aye, then that's what we'll do," John turned to EDI, "Set a course for the Iera System."

"Wait, Spartan-Commander," interrupted Legion, "I have just received new from Rannoch, that Cortana-Mother Intelligence has recovered from her re-write and reboot and is ready for active duty again."

"Alright," _I'm going to need her for this_, thought John to himself, "Set a course for Rannoch instead. We'll deal with that quick, and head to the Shadow Sea. Everyone, dismissed."

Everybody left but Garrus, who stopped and said, "Seeing as I'm not in your Alliance, I suppose I don't have to worry about insubordination, but what do you think you're doing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Taking command, nobody knew who you were four months ago, until we picked you up in the middle of space. Now you're taking command? I can't believe that's what the Commander would have wanted."

"Chain of command, I don't like it any more than you do, but I'll do my duty, and so will you."

Garrus scowled, "I trusted the Commander, and to an extent I trusted you. But right now, everything is at stake, and if you think that I'm willing to pin all our hopes and our lives on you, then you're sadly mistaken."

Chief gave him a long look and said, "I understand what you're saying, but I think you're a little blindsided by grief."

"How...How dare you!"

"Supposedly you were a great soldier, that's what Shepard told me. So you should be able to see that we can't afford division right now. Yeah, I would be dismissive of me too, but you know what, that's just how it is, so I suggest you go sober up before we need to get to the next mission."

Garrus shook his head off and said as he left, "Very well..." he spat out the last word, "_Commander_."

John sighed, it was going to be a tough road.

* * *

><p>Fortunately, Garrus was the only one who seemed to be showing any kind of disrespect to John. Most of the crew understood his situation, and therefore he was able to reassure them as best he could. However, he knew very well that they doubted they would win, but they hadn't come this far to quit. As they set off to Rannoch, John took the time to talk to each of the crew, even the simple servicemen, about the situation. When he got to Liara's room, he found her underneath the covers of her bed, a mountain of datapads on top of her, and her blue head buried into the pillows.<p>

"Liara?" John asked the pile.

"Oh, John, I'm sorry, I...didn't know you had come in," she kept her head under the blankets and sniffled.

"Liara, we need to talk, about what happened on Thessia."

"No!" she yelled, startling John, "We don't..."

"Yes," said John firmly, "What happened down there wasn't your fault!"

"My people, everything, might be lost, because I wasn't quick enough," she stood up, and the datapads all dropped to the floor in a hurly-burly, "How can you say that is not my fault?"

"Because you had no way of knowing Cerberus was going to beat us to the chase, because the Reapers are something we can't beat on foot. That's what Shepard would have said, anyway."

Liara looked away from John and out the Normandy's window, staring out into the beyond. Then she said, almost in a whisper, "Shepard...he's on me, too."

John shook his head, "If anyone is to blame, it's me, I couldn't reach him in time."

Liara didn't know what to say so John spoke again after a few seconds of silence, "Listen, for the time being, I'm in charge. I didn't want this, but I have no choice. So I need to know if you're ready for whatever comes for us."

"John..." began Liara, "I have only known you for a few months," she gently took John's much larger, meatier hands into her own, "and you already are something special to me," she smiled sadly, "And I'll support you through it all, but honestly, I don't have much hope left. The odds are against us."

"I know," was all John could say.

Liara pulled him in and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, "Thank you for coming down, I'll focus my efforts on helping the refugees. I can do that much."

"Alright," John left her to her work, and then headed to the AI Core.

* * *

><p>A few moments later, John came upon Legion, standing about as if he were doing anything. But John knew better, that Legion was actually probably doing many things, just wireless. The Geth construct was humanoid in shape, in fact, the Geth race had been modeled after Quarians, all save for the headpiece, a curved banana-shaped piece of metal that ended with a grand lightbulb head that glowed white-hot, or red, depending on the situation. Underneath Legion's right shoulder, was a piece of N7 armor, which John had only just noticed recently, and thought about asking the synthetic about sometime else. Instead, John asked, "Legion, do you have a moment?"<p>

"Affirmative, Spartan-Commander."

"You say Cortana is fixed?"

"Affirmative."

"The other AI, EDI, how did she gain a body?"

Legion looked at John as if contemplating the question, and said nothing, then said, "EDI, as you humans say, 'possessed', a Cerberus Synthetic that attacked Shepard-Commander on Mars."

"Do you think it would be possible to do the same for Cortana? But implant her in a Geth body?"

"Yes."

"If Cortana is willing, could we do it when we got to Rannoch?"

"Of course, but I wonder why you would not want a human body?"

"Well, I don't think we have the time to scour for one, at the moment."

Legion shook his head, apparently he had picked up the trait somehow, "No, we actually confiscated human mimicking infiltration units from the Geth Heretics, that we have in storage on Rannoch, that you could make use of."

"Heretics?"

"Ah, yes, the Geth that opposed Shepard-Commander during his fight against Arterius-Spectre."

"Oh right, Saren," John put a finger to his chin and thought, "Why were they building those?"

"The Heretics assumed that Sovereign would lead them to victory. In order to assist in the Reaper Harvest, they wanted to build platforms that resembled humans in order to infiltrate human resistances. After Sovereign was lost, they forgot about them. We eventually found them on a Heretic world when we started the Reclamation."

"I see, well we can try them instead then."

"Excellent," replied Legion, sounding somewhat pleased, "I will send an order to Rannoch to begin preparations."

John nodded and said, "Good," but as he turned away to leave, he then turned his back and asked Legion, "Legion, one more thing."

"Yes?"

"How do you rate our chances, now that I am in command temporarily?"

Legion did not say anything at first, then he said, "Spartan-Commander has proven that he is capable, but that being said, he does not have the known combat capability to deal with this

Reaper threat. While you do claim that you have seen similar situations in the universe that you came from, we, have not seen this and therefore the rest of the crew is reluctant to trust you with their well-being. However, being a Synthetic life-form, I am lifted from the biases that restrain organic beings. The odds are not in your favor, this is true, and there is a greater chance that we lose. But...

"You give us a chance, which is better than none. And you trusted us enough with Cortana, allowing for our rise to sentience. And in return, I will trust you. So, it matters not."

John grinned slightly and then said, "Thank you, Legion."

"Affirmative."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: That chapter took forever, but I hope it was worth it. Regards ~ Gehenna

42. Cortana

****Brothers in Steel Chapter 41****

****Cortana****

* * *

><p>The blare of an emergency siren woke Michael Shay up from his slumber. Immediately he dashed up and fingered for his Phalanx pistol, red lights flashing on and off inside the Cerberus barracks. The others were all waking up as well, wondering what exactly the hell was going on, when a voice over the intercom yelled out, "CONTAINMENT SEAL BREACHED; LOOSE CONTAMINANTS IN SPECIMEN LAB 0-00751, DESIGNATE: PROJECT GREENMATTER."<p>

The creature! It had escaped somehow!

Shay yelled out to the guards under his command, waving his arm towards the hallway, when he heard a gunshot nearby. Quickly, Shay put on his white and yellow Cerberus armor and slipped the helmet on. From within, everything was cloaked in a haze of dark jet blue, where enemies would be labeled as white-hot, as well as projectiles coming his way. Shay led his troops down the hallway, which was tight, and on the left-hand side, a glass window gave a nice view of one of the inner courtyards. From there you could see the nearby Comm tower, which was the heart of the facility, and the cylindrical outline of the nuclear power plant that powered the base.

But Shay had no time to think about that now, and he ran towards the creature's containment. He tried to hail Lawson on the communicator, frantically yelling, "Mr. Lawson, Mr. Lawson, do you read?" But no answer came. Shay had a sick feeling in his gut.

He and his men finally reached the main door to enter the room. The lights were still flashing red, and the smell of something rotting and foul gained Shay's attention, as well as the crackle of sparks

from electrical panels ripped from the wall. They breached the door and entered the main room, one level overlooking the glass enclosure, but what Shay saw he could not believe his eyes.

Great tentacles had grown from the lump, but they had not been there yesterday. They had somehow pried apart the entry door, where food (in the form of refugees) was given. The tentacles had slithered through the room, tearing apart data consoles, the circuits flung around the room haphazardly, smoking, and making the room hazy with smog, like someone just burnt their toast. Above the observatory floor, there had been another room, built into the wall, that had a glass window, now shattered, the pieces falling onto the floor. Dead bodies were strangely not present, and that's when Shay noticed what was hanging on the glass wall.

"Lawson..." breathed Shay in shock, as he beheld one of the most disturbing images he had ever seen.

One tentacle hung over the side of the glass, and inside the tentacle, his skin now gray-green, fused to the tentacle around him. His neck was broken, and hung limp to the side, his eyes turned up, his tongue lolling about, dripping green fluid. His arms were no longer visible, as were his legs below the knee. The tentacles stirred, and then moved. Shay's men fired without question, grouping their shots on the tentacle, but doing little damage.

The tentacles started to move up, and immediately shot towards Shay's men. That's when he heard a voice, a deep, dark voice unlike anything he had ever heard, boring down into his skull. It spoke, in almost a song, "Fresh meat, wandering so close I see, you will now spread the Flood's cruel, cold, Symphony."

Shay was filled to the brim with his fear. His entire went cold and rigid, as his men screamed and taken by the tentacles. Balloon shaped creatures, with tentacles for arms and hands, crawled along the length of the bigger creature's tentacles, and attacked his men. Their armor was nothing more than a brittle egg shell to these monsters, and he heard their final screams, before explosions of blood gurgled forth like a rushing river from within their helmets, as the creatures stuck their tentacles through the eyeballs of his men. Cruel, cold laughter followed from the creature, and Shay finally got the gall to run.

As he ran into the hall behind him, he heard it say one more demented rhyme, "What is the matter Shay? Is this not the game you wanted to play?"

How does it know my name, thought Shay to himself as he fled in panic, unable to stop the beast from spreading past the doors and into the heart of Sanctuary.

* * *

><p>The Normandy came out of the relay the next day, sometime in the early morning, and flew its way towards Rannoch. John suited up in his armor, and decided to bring Legion and Tali with him to do the retrieval. Legion would come along to help if he was needed, and John figured Tali might feel better if she could have a few hours with her own people, shore leave as it were. She had not spoken to John at all since Thessia, and didn't even look at him at all either.

In fact, she seemed not even aware of Legion at all, which was something. John sighed and decided to worry about that later.

They took the shuttle, and got a good view of the Quarian camps which had been set up to begin the colonization effort. Agricultural camps had been constructed, with rows for crops being dug out in fields nearby. Most of the Quarrians that lived on the ground were living in green canvas tents or in prefab shelters that looked like mobile homes, without the wheels though. The shuttle zoomed on by though, and headed across a placid, blue-green ocean, to an island in the middle.

The island was not large, and had a strange, dome-like structure made of steel in the middle. A curved hangar door on the north side of the structure slowly started to open, and Cortez rounded the shuttle about to get a parking trajectory. Cortez drove them into the Geth hangar, and John saw through the Kodiak's shuttle, a large group of Geth units, led by a single crimson Geth Prime, awaiting their return.

"We have arrived," stated Legion.

"Lets go," answered John, and they all left the shuttle.

The Geth met them, and all at once spoke when Legion appeared, "Master."

Legion gave John a look and flexed the metallic flaps that were on the side of his light bulb head, as if he were shrugging.

The Geth Prime led them to a lift, and the elevator ride that followed was quite possibly the most awkward ever. They had to go to the top floor, and when they got there, they had a grand view of the seascape around them. They were on a flat balcony, where in the middle of the room was a set of consoles and a tube that looked similar to a cryo tube, but was not. Inside was a synthetic body, which John realized was what Cortana was going to now inhabit.

The Geth Prime spoke in a throaty rumble, "Spartan-Commander can speak with Cortana-Mother Intelligence before we begin, just approach that console."

John walked over to the console and pressed a few keys, then saw as Cortana appeared on the screen, looking like her normal self. She said with a sly smile on her face, "Did you miss me?"

"More than you know," said John, "I have a few things to tell you later."

"I bet, and so do I. These Geth are amazing!"

"I know, they fixed you, and one's on our...my team."

"I see," said Cortana, "When they told me I might have a real body, I didn't know what to think."

"Yeah, I thought there might be some advantages, of course, if you'd rather live in my suit, I'd understand."

"No, this is what I want, but I just wanted to make sure you were

ready, we have worked so close over the years."

"It won't be any different, you just won't be able to see what I'm thinking all the time."

Cortana laughed, "No, I won't. Alright then, lets get on with it. Geth Prime T22-A/6B, yank me."

"As you command."

The Prime walked over and lit up its omni-tool which appeared as a light blue as opposed to yellow like John's and everybody else's. Cortana disappeared from the monitor, and red and blue lights blinked wildly on top of the cryo-tube, until ten seconds later, a hiss of steam came out as the tube popped open. Immediately Cortana's new body walked out, and John took a moment to look at her.

Unlike EDI's body, Cortana now had actual skin, and it was a sort of pale peach color, not very tanned. Her hair was a light brown, long, and wavy. She wore a complete one piece suit that covered her entire body, the color black. The suit had little hexagonal patterns ingrained in it that flashed silver, like the scales of a fish. Her face looked very young, and had flawless skin, eyes set the perfect pace apart, the color of a periwinkle blue. She looked young enough to be John's daughter, since he was technically over fifty years old, though cryo-sleep tends to keep one young and fresh.

"That's...interesting."

"Yeah," said Cortana somewhat regrettably, "I know I don't look very...old? I guess, the Geth Heretics believed that the most inconspicuous looking human sample would be a white human female between ages seventeen and twenty-one. Which they were right of course, though I would have rather had shorter hair...the color pink too."

"Well we can worry about that later," said John, "Its just good enough you have a body. What can it do anyway?"

"Well, its resistant to small-arms weapons fire, I can tell you that. At the same time it has stimulated nerve sensors, so while it may not seem like it, I'm for the first time in my life, bursting with nerve activity, feeling what an actual ground feels like."

"Wow," said John, astonished, "Congratulations, I guess this is like, your birthday?"

"I guess so. I also have enhanced optics, and can interact with computer systems...enemy computer systems, and thankfully, my voice is the same."

John nodded and then added, "Well good. I guess we'll take what we can get. You ready to get into active service?"

Cortana's new eyes flitted mischievously on a Predator pistol that was on the table nearby her. She walked over to it, picked it up and admired it, then said, "Hell yes."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Let the hate over Cortana's new form commence.

43. Reclaimer Part 1

****Brothers in Steel Chapter 42****

****Reclaimer Part 1****

* * *

><p>Cortana got some looks when she arrived aboard the Normandy the next day, most of all from James, who, in his shock, dropped the weights he was carrying onto Cortez's foot, causing the Lieutenant to curse loudly in both Spanish and English. The reaction was similar for many of the lesser crew, and even Joker seemed to be mildly impressed. EDI however, did not seem to notice, or even care, and John suspected that she had created feelings of jealousy, though he had no proof of this. As they traveled through FTL towards the Rannoch relay, John invited Cortana up to his cabin (his new one, for he had inherited Shepard's) for a private chat.<p>

"Nice," said Cortana looking over the room, "But now I have a million questions for you."

John had expected this, and crossed his shoulders, shrugging, "Alright."

"How exactly did you become Commander of this ship?"

John sighed, "Old one died on a mission. Chain of command was clear."

"Very odd, but I suppose this is a step-up for you," she sat down on John's bed and looked up at him, "We've come very far, you and I."

"Yeah, I suppose we have."

"And now everything relies on you," Cortana laughed, "Like it always does."

"Aye, well, we just take it one step at a time."

"I guess so. I've heard some interesting rumors about you..."

John guessed what this was about, "About what?"

"About your...fraternization with the Doctor, T'soni, I mean."

"Who'd you hear that from?"

"James," admitted Cortana absently, "It was easy, he would pretty much do anything short of treason for me now. I'm starting to like this new body, it has its advantages."

"That seems to be the point of why it was designed."

"No doubt, but anyways, back to the point."

"Yes well...while you were gone...Liara and I...well..."

"Got to know each other I take it?"

"Yeah."

"Good."

This surprised John, "Good?"

"Yeah, good," replied Cortana softly, "I have to be straight with you. I know how you think and I know how you never thought you could have any semblance of a normal life before. But Liara can make that happen when this is all over. And that makes me...happy for you."

"Oh...well, thanks."

Cortana smiled, "You'll always be my protector, I trust you enough not to worry you'll let me down."

"Never."

* * *

><p>The next day, they were on their way to Sanctuary. John had chosen Legion and Garrus to come along on the mission, as Cortana needed to do stress testing to make sure she could last in combat. However, Legion was somewhat of a tech expert as well, and John had come to really become fond of the Synthetic, who was now even more organic in his attitude, though John suspected he would never fully act human, as he remained driven by logic. Still, Legion was beginning to start conversations of his own accord, about things that did not relate to the task at hand.<p>

John had chosen Garrus because he had skills that would help against Cerberus forces. John and him had not spoken since Garrus' outburst in the War Room, but Garrus seemed to have gotten over Thessia, and had been acting professionally.

John looked out of the Kodiak's window to take a look at Sanctuary. The complex was kind of like a military compound, with a huge tower in the center for communications. But according to EDI, all communications had been severed from the base. Wherever they were going, troubled had brewed, and John had his team be ready for anything. What they saw confirmed their suspicions that there had been a battle of some kind. The courtyard outside the front entrance of the facility looked like a war zone; rubble was strewn about everywhere and sky cars were overturned, smashed apart or slagged. Civilian bodies lay in heaps near isolated brush fires. The smell of ozone and burning flesh permeated the air as John led his team off the Kodiak and onto the ground.

"Evidence suggests that there was a conflict here, Spartan-Commander," noted Legion.

"It would appear so," replied John, "Alright, lets move in, but keep

your guard up."

"Acknowledged."

Something didn't seem right. It was eerily quiet, and there was little in the way of Cerberus bodies around. Also, all the shuttles seemed to have been destroyed, which John thought strange, as why would nobody evacuate? In fact, why had no Cerberus reinforcements come by?

They walked in through the front door and into a large processing center. The floors were made of a shiny ceramic tiling, and there were several areas with benches and seats for visitors to wait. An automated voice feed was playing from the ceiling, instructing people to bring all forms of identification for processing. There was an area nearby that had several desks with computers and terminals on them, but much of the equipment was thrown onto the floor without care. A shuttle port lay below the area, where more shuttles smoked and burned after somebody had deliberately destroyed them.

They searched the room for any clue as to what could have happened, and John stumbled upon a screen with footage of large groups of people being herded towards a big door. "That's a lot of refugees," noted Garrus, "Wonder what Cerberus wanted with them?"

"Past record indicates that Cerberus intent will have negative impact on refugees."

"You're telling me," replied Garrus dryly.

"Lets pick up the pace," ordered John, and they headed downstairs.

What they found down there at first, provided no clues, just more dead bodies, none of them Cerberus, all of them just refugees. Where had all the soldiers gone to?

But then...John turned a corner and heard a voice, a female's with an Australian accent calling out from a terminal nearby. He went up to it, and saw that it was mostly static. "Legion, can you clear this up?"

"Affirmative," replied the Synthetic, waving his omni-tool over it and removing the static. The voice spoke, "My name is Miranda Lawson, and this is not a refugee camp. This is a Cerberus science lab run by my father, Henry Lawson. Do not go any further, turn back now! Its not safe."

"Science lab?" said Garrus, "What were they trying to learn?"

"Most likely something to combat the Reapers," suggested Legion.

"No, Cerberus is attempting to control the Reapers," said John.

"The chances of that are unlikely."

"I know, they're indoctrinated. The Reapers are making them think like that so they'll divide and conquer us. But I refuse to let that happen, so lets keep moving."

John turned off the terminal and went out into a glass-shelled dome. There were plants everywhere, huge ferns and palm trees placed about on artificial islands connected by suspension bridges. However, the trail seemed to end there for them, as there was no way to get out further into the facility. They were being blocked by a lake of water, where the dead bodies of a few Cerberus soldiers, the first that John had seen, bobbing up and down along the surface. John smelled a musty odor that seemed oddly familiar, but shook it aside.

"Spartan-Commander," said Legion, interrupting John's thoughts, "I have found a security panel. Shutting off."

Within a moment, the water in the lake below quickly receded, revealing a hidden passageway among giant orange tubes.

"Looks like they wanted to hide something," said Garrus.

John climbed down a wet ladder onto the floor. Then, they walked over to a door in the wall, revealing a dimly lit chamber, where the temperature was much colder than it was back in the greenhouse dome. Steam shoots came out from pipes along the wall. The musty odor came back again, and was more pungent.

"What's that smell?" asked Garrus.

"Beats me," replied John as they moved forward.

The next room they came into was obviously a laboratory, but something had happened to it. The room's air seemed to be covered in a condensed green fog. The walls, the computers, the glass view ports over looking a larger room nearby, all was covered in strange green growths and vines, knobbly and gnarled. Large sacs were growing on the walls as well, and John found some bodies, seemingly glued into the growths, their skin and backs fused together.

"What the hell?" said Garrus.

"No...that's...that's impossible," said John to himself.

"What?"

"This looks like...Flood."

"What?" repeated Garrus, dumbfounded.

"The monsters, the ones I fought where I came from, they absorb organic life, use it to multiply and become smarter, but that's...they were wiped out, I saw it happen! Its why I'm here! The Halo ring should have destroyed them all!"

Garrus looked askance and replied, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"How is this possible? Did they come with me? And how did Cerberus get a hold of them?"

"What the hell is a Flood?" demanded Garrus.

"I'll show you," answered John grimly. He took his Mattock assault rifle off his back and fired a round at one of the sacs. It exploded in a fountain of slimy green offal, and from it sprung out several small balloon shaped creatures. Their bulbous bodies were white, and their tentacles were green, though some ended in red, root-like appendages. They made a kind of clicking noise as they scampered about. Garrus quickly pulled out his Predator and shot them, each one popping like an obscene, smelly bubble.

John walked around the room and came up to the glass. The lights inside the room behind the glass were shut off, but flickered on and off. He got closer, and closer, until his helmet was less than an inch away. He squinted his eyes to try and get a better view, but was completely taken aback when the light flashed, and a full grown Flood form, formed from a human host, crashed against the glass. John took a step back, and observed the monstrosity. It had once been a human, but now it was barely recognizable. The neck had been broken, and the head hung slack. The arms were broken as well and covered in the green growths. The legs were stunted and wrapped like paper around a bottle of wine.

"Gah!" yelled Garrus.

"Does this form repulse you?" said a cold, menacing voice, deeper than anything John could imagine.

"Who said that?"

"He did," John said, pointing at the Flood, "Which means that a Gravemind is nearby."

The Gravemind laughed, each laugh relayed through the chipped yellow teeth and rotting, green lips of the host, then it spoke in a sing-song voice, "Once more we meet, Reclaimer, son of my broken destroyer."

Reclaimer. John's Forerunner title, and the name of Humanity. This Gravemind had the memories of the old one, and was probably just as deadly. John tightened the grip on his Mattock and said, "How did you get here?"

"We were but one spore, forever drifting, but it was your ship, that did the heavy lifting."

"You came with on the Forward Unto Dawn?"

"Correct, Reclaimer."

John frowned, "Then what? I landed on Tuchanka, this is quite a bit of a distance from there. Who brought you here?"

"Cerberus, obviously. They had forces on the planet you call Tuchanka, we were but one small parasite then, but we took hold in a beast, and spread to a man. The one named Shay, yes, such a bright lad, he thought we were something worth saving, and so brought me here."

Garrus walked over to a nearby door and looked through the window, seeing a large group of the Flood massing, hunched over and looking

very threatening.

"And then what?" interrogated John further.

"The Lawson man, his mind not his own, fed us bodies until we were full grown. He could not possibly have known what would happen."

"A composite lifeform," said Legion, "An organic consensus?"

"What is this? A man of steel," questioned the Gravemind haughtily, "Begone Ancilla, you are not worthy to look upon...perfection."

"Contempt for Synthetics confirmed," noted Legion.

"And then you broke out?" asked John.

"Twas not very hard at all you see, Lawson could never have been ready."

"So why haven't you attacked us yet?"

Somehow, the Gravemind pulled back the reflexive muscles of the body's mouth to form a demented smile, then it spoke again, "We wish to offer you a deal."

"Never," said John immediately, "Your kind can't be trusted."

The Gravemind chuckled, "No, we can not, but what will your petty hatred of us gain you when you lie in ashes on a burned world, cast down by the Reapers' might?"

"How do you know about the Reapers?"

John heard a scoff, and it replied, "We absorb all, and through that, we know all. The Reapers are a threat for us so early into our infancy. We can spread, and we can spot them, but we require you leave us be, turn back now and allow us to spread across this planet and use its ships for our own. We will spread to the far corners of the galaxy, and absorb the Reapers, for they are not machines...only pale imitations."

"We came here to get information on Cerberus," countered John angrily, "Not make suicidal deals."

"All that information rests with me, hidden from prying eyes, you see. But do what we wish, and we'll hand it over to you, what is it you want to know?"

"Where the Cerberus main base of operations is," said Garrus.

"What an easy question, it lies in the Anadius system of the Horsehead nebula, a very remote place, I assure you. Now what do you say? Do you leave and allow us to win your war for you? Or do you attempt to fight, and be slaughtered by us? Either way, we will get what we want."

John thought about it. If he did take this deal, the Flood would take on the Reapers. The Reapers were alone unstoppable, but the Flood were even worse. They would take the Reapers and turn them into their

toys, and then there would be no chance. The Flood would consume all life in this new galaxy. They might pretend now that they had humanity's interests at heart, but they would turn on them once the Reapers were taken care of, and John would not allow that, not ever.

John looked over to the nearby door to see the Flood army massing at the gates. Slowly, he took one hand off his gun and slowly reached for an incendiary grenade. He started to sweat a little from the tension, and then Gravemind asked again, "What will it be, Reclaimer? My horde grows impatient."

John activated the grenade and said, "I have a new deal, how about you go to hell!"

He threw at the door and yelled, "Run!"

John, Legion and Garrus ran back where they came, and the doors behind them opened, the Flood pouring inside, snarling and making frightful noises. The incendiary grenade exploded in a flash of orange and red, and set many of them on fire. Some were vaporized, and others started crumbling into ashes, but many still were behind them, dogging the team in hot pursuit.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Miranda isn't dead, tune in next week for part 2.

44. Reclaimer Part 2

****Brothers in Steel Part 43****

****Reclaimer Part 2****

* * *

><p>The Flood horde gave chase, pushing them back into the dome, and forcing them to scurry up back to the top level. The Flood, no longer impeded by the lake, were able to use their impressive physical abilities to jump quite high and threatened to overtake the team. John kept facing backwards every now and then to lay down some shots over his shoulder, but there were too many for him to take on.<p>

They went back out to the main processing center and jumped over the railing into the docking port. John spotted a door over on the right side of the wall and quickly motioned his team to rush for it. The Flood were so close he could almost feel them breathing, could hear their mangled legs slopping together messily on the floor. The team scrambled over the wrecked shuttles and to the door. John led them in and yelled at Legion, "Lock that door now!"

"I don't have the override codes!"

Quickly John tried to force the door shut by hand, and he almost succeeded when a Flood came up and forced its hand between the door and the wall, snarling. John popped out his omni-blade in response and severed the ugly arm, watching it collapse to the ground. Then he

quickly slammed the door shut, listening to the sound of the Flood outside clamoring to force it open.

"That won't keep them out forever," said John grimly, "They'll know how to use tools, and weapons. Lets keep moving, we need to get somewhere safe so we can plan on how we're going to get that information and then level the place."

They found themselves in a dark corridor with no lights. John took out his omni-tool and so did Legion, and they slowly crept through the hall.

John felt himself getting increasingly colder, and realized that the corridor was starting to slant, and that they were heading down, deep into the underground.

"We must be getting towards the basement," suggested Garrus.

"Agreed."

They continued until they entered a wide, circular room, with a door on the north side, and a metal grating on the floor, revealing a dark, deep hole underneath, where streams of water, presumably sewage material from the facility, was trickling down below.

"Legion, see if you can open that door."

"Affirmative, Spartan-Commander."

John went over to the grating and took a look down. Then Garrus asked, "Did you consider its deal at all?"

"No."

"Why not?" asked Garrus, puzzled.

"They can't be trusted."

"Are you completely sure?"

"Completely."

Garrus said nothing, but John could tell he was at least a little skeptical.

Legion interrupted their silence by saying, "I have opened the door."

"Lets get inside."

"Communication with the Normandy is being blocked down here, even if we wanted an Evac, we couldn't get it," said Garrus regretfully.

"Well we can't leave anyway not without destroying..." began John as heard the click of a dozen safeties going off and the appearance of several malevolent shadows forming all around him. Each one of them was holding a rifle pointed straight at John and his teammates.

"Don't move a muscle," whispered John.

"Put your weapons down and your hands up!" said a demanding voice. It sounded familiar, it was female...and had an Australian accent.

John nodded to his team to do as they were told, realizing that these were the survivors from the upstairs. He put his gun down and said, "Look, we're not here to harm you."

"Yeah, you're not one of those things," a male voice spoke now, "But who the hell are you?"

John realized that these could be Cerberus personnel, so he asked them, "You tell us who you are first."

A silence followed. Then the Australian woman answered back, "We're survivors. That's all you need to know. Only one of us worked for Cerberus, if that's what you're asking."

"Alright," said John, "We're with the Alliance. We came to investigate this place, and look for information."

"What kind of information?"

"Classified information."

There was another pause; then the woman said, "Hit the lights."

A few dim, blue lights appeared, slightly illuminating the darkness, good enough to see what John was looking at. The Australian woman was a female about the same height as Garrus, so quite tall, with an athletic figure. She wore a kind of white jumpsuit with black patches on the shoulders and arms, and all over there was a kind of hexagon pattern. Her face looked like a super-models, free from imperfections, and her hair was of medium length, and raven black.

Most of the other people were nothing more than civilians still in casual wear, most of them men and women of middle age, but John saw a few children as well, boys and girls who were covered head to toe in a layer of grime. There was also a man with a close-cropped haircut and a flat, emotionless face, wearing the yellow and white armor of a Cerberus trooper. John decided to keep an eye on that one.

"Vakarian!" the woman said in surprise.

"Miranda!" replied Garrus in astonishment.

"Lawson-Operative," said Legion.

"Legion!"

"What's going on here?" John asked, puzzled.

"Miranda helped us defeat the Collectors with Shepard," explained Garrus, "I recognized her voice on the message."

"You didn't think to share that information?"

"Well, I thought she might be working with Cerberus..."

"No," said Miranda firmly, "I am not with them, anymore. I can't believe Shepard didn't tell any of you that. Where is Shepard anyway?"

Garrus looked awkwardly at John who said matter-of-factly, "Commander Shepard is MIA, I am in command of the Normandy for the moment."

Miranda looked John up and down and said, "Don't be offended when I say my confidence is not of the same elevation without Shepard."

"Its fine, I'm getting that a lot lately. But I got a job to do."

"Yeah I'm sure, alright everybody," she said to the crowd, "Disperse, there's nothing to see here."

The other survivors left, and then Miranda bade them follow her to an empty storage garage, where a bunch of cleaning machines had been stored. "Alright," asked Miranda, "what's your plan for getting out of here?"

"Do you have any idea what those things upstairs are?"

"No," Miranda shook her head, "I have no idea."

"Well I do," answered John, "And they have to be destroyed. We can't leave until we do. But still, we do need to plan an Evac for these civilians."

"Indeed," said Miranda.

"Do you know if there are any explosives in this facility?"

Miranda replied, "None large enough to destroy the entire facility. I can show you the blueprints," she took out her omni-tool, "I'm transferring them to you now."

Garrus took a look, "Where are these flood concentrated the most? Do you know?"

"They have a sort of lead intelligence, I'm not sure how to describe it..."

"Its called a Gravemind," interrupted John.

"Excuse me, but how do you know all this?"

"I've fought these things before."

"Where?"

"Its a long story, I'll tell you it when we get out of here."

Miranda shrugged, "Well, whatever. The Gravemind as you call it, has

taken up residence in the Comms tower."

"Damn it," cursed Garrus, "That's where our information would be."

"What information are you looking for?"

Garrus took a look at John, who considered sharing the information, then nodded.

"We're looking for the location of the Cerberus headquarters."

"Oh," said Miranda, "Well that's easy, its in the Anadius system of the Horsehead Nebula."

"So the Gravemind was actually telling us the truth," said Legion.

"Apparently it was."

John looked again through the blueprints, then noticed something, "Hey, hold on a second. It says here, that's there a nuclear reactor on the north side of the complex."

"Yeah," said Miranda, "The power requirements on this place are enormous. They wanted to be self-sufficient. Probably so they wouldn't be noticed by the locals."

"What was this place originally built for?"

"My father was luring refugees with food and shelter, to turn them into husks, so he could study indoctrination. From the best of my knowledge, he was mostly killed by those...things."

John shook his head, "The Illusive Man is twisted."

"Yes, he is."

"But anyways, is the Nuclear Reactor still online?"

"Obviously, or otherwise these lights wouldn't be working."

"You never considered that there would be backups?"

"There are, but they need to be activated manually from a control terminal, which the Flood have overtaken."

"Maybe then, if we can fight our way to the Nuclear Reactor, we can figure a way to make it explode. The blast might be able to kill the Flood. We'll have to make a mad dash for an Evac though, but our pilot can meet us up at the north side, once we can get into contact with him."

Miranda nodded, "That might be a good plan, if we can figure out how to get there."

"Look," said Garrus, "We can use the ventilation tunnels to travel underneath the Comm tower. We'll have to be silent though, otherwise those things might hear us."

"That might be hard to do with civilians though," said John, "Are there any other options?"

"It might be dirty, but there are sewage pipes large enough for people to walk through."

"Hmmm..." thought John, "Alright, Miranda, will you allow your people to walk through."

"Of course, they might not like it, but they understand its the only way out alive. With you here, we might have enough firepower to do it, and we'll have evac, which is something we didn't have before, since Cerberus destroyed all the shuttles. Being so good at quarantines, they realized the threat of this thing getting off-world."

"Good, how many of you can fight?"

"I can, the Cerberus defector Shay can, and three of our men and two of our women can. Everybody else is injured, or is a child, so they'll have to stay back."

"Garrus and two of them can watch the non-combatants, and stay behind in the pipes, while we clear a path outside after we exit the pipes. The Flood will be bound to see our presence once we leave."

"Sounds like a good plan, so far we've noticed that they take quite a bit of hits to take down."

"Yes," agreed John, "And melee attacks are next to useless. So we need more ammo too."

"We have a little left, but we can stop by this armory," Miranda pointed to a building on the way to the nuclear power plant, "And pick up some there. Shay should have a keycard that grants access."

"Well," said John, "Lets get it done."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: The Next Installment will most likely be around four thousand words long, maybe more, so it will probably not come out for a while, maybe two, three weeks. At the same time, I'm looking for Beta-readers to read an original piece by me called "Arcturus" and to give critique. If you are interested, PM me. Thank you ~ Gehenna.

45. Reclaimer Part 3

Brothers In Steel Part 44

Reclaimer Part 3

* * *

><p>Miranda organized her people just as John had instructed. John realized that Miranda had a little sister among the small group of children there, a fifteen year old girl that looked a lot like

Miranda, but younger, and dressed a little more conservatively. There were four or five older seniors, and the rest of the men and women that were able to, picked up arms and decided to fight. They knew that without them pitching in, there would be no hope in getting out of there alive. There were about twenty of them together.<p>

After they were organized and everybody knew the plan, they began to move as one through the sub-basement. It took them a half-hour to get to the entrance to the sewers. With no tools available, John and Garrus slowly had to cut a way open with their omni-tools, until a ring of molten metal formed around the grating, letting it fall to the ground with a _clang_. John raised his gun immediately, in case Flood were attracted by the sound, but for the mean time, there were no contacts.

"In the pipe, everybody, keep it quiet!"

They walked into the pipe, and John's heavy metal boots sloshed through refuse and dirty sewage water. A rat scurried by, squeaking, and John put a finger up to his helmet to tell them to stop talking. There was but one groan from a child, but everybody else managed to keep quiet as they began walking the length of the smelly, dark corridor. Condensation dripped from the ceiling and formed ripples in the stagnant filth below, and John put on the flashlight on his helmet to get a better view of where he was going.

Every so often he would have to pull out his map of the facility when they needed to make a turn, and then he would choose the right direction. Then they reached the area underneath the comm tower. Above them would be the Gravemind, and if the Gravemind detected their presence, there was no way for them to survive the initial onslaught. At the same time, they could not afford to dally, as the Flood needed to be destroyed before they moved out to the other cities on Horizon, and take up space-craft.

"Wait here," whispered John to Miranda, "Legion, Shay, come with me."

The two of them followed at John's heel, and they moved down the pipe. John saw a glimmer of light ahead, and turned off his helmet-light, hugging the concrete walls of the pipeline. He looked above as he entered a shaft of light, and looked to see that he was under a part of the facility that was outside. He checked the map: they were right in front of the Comm tower, on the other side. They would be safe for now.

"Alright, you're good," said John on the Comm. No response came, though John had told them to keep radio silence, and did not worry. The group came in about two minutes later, and they kept moving on in unison.

Finally, after about half an hour, they arrived at where they needed to be, a pumping station in front of the nuclear reactor main building. There was a service ladder in front of a long waterfall, and this was where John motioned them to stop. "Garrus," ordered John, "Stay with Smith and Pierce and guard the civilians, the rest of us, lets move up the ladder and take the pumping station. From there, we'll have to fight our way to the nuclear reactor. If we fail, Garrus, I'll try to send a distress signal to the Alliance, if that fails..."

He left the words unsaid, since he didn't want the children to hear. Garrus simply nodded and said, "Good luck Commander."

John didn't know why, but that made him smile slightly.

John led the party up the ladder, and opened the top of the hatch. They had entered a large boilery room, with pipes everywhere, pipes covered up in Flood webbing and growths. A group of infection forms immediately popped out of some brown sacs by the wall. "Open fire!" growled John, and they let loose a couple of short, controlled bursts that killed over a hundred of the little balloon creatures. John reloaded then said, "There's no point in trying to be stealthy. I don't know for sure, but I think they have the ability to share their viewpoints with the Gravemind, he controls them all. Lets just keep moving."

They moved through the room, taking out infection forms, then walked up a flight of stairs to the main level. They could see the outside clearly, an empty, coverless plain that was flat grassland. The nuclear reactor was on the other side, and John could see huge smokestacks gushing from the cylindrical towers. That's where they needed to get to.

"Alright, on the count of three, we all make a break for it," said John.

"I'm a biotic," said Miranda, "I'll cover our rear with a barrier."

"Good idea."

The party burst through the double doors. Immediately from the nuclear reactor building, over thirty or so Flood burst through the glass, jumping like demons from the pages of a demented fairy tale. Some of them were holding shotguns and assault rifles in their mutated, bulbous hands, and firing them haphazardly at the group. Two of John's men were downed instantly by stray shots as they did not have any armor. John yelled, "Open fire!"

Miranda shifted her barriers in front of them, which absorbed some of the bullets. John started firing from behind the barrier and managed to down a few of the Flood. However, they just kept coming relentlessly, and soon enough were attacking the barrier. One jumped on Miranda, and Legion acted quickly and pushed it off her. Then he lit it on fire with his omni-tool. John spun around and fired several shots into a group that were starting to tear apart at some of his civilians. "Damn it!" yelled Shay, who watched another pair of civilians get dragged down, the combat forms vomiting infection forms onto them, so they could join their ranks.

John pulled out his pistol instead of reloading and shot both of them in the head, so they wouldn't become Flood. Then he threw an incendiary grenade, his last, at the mass of Flood and burned them away into ashes.

"Come on!" he gestured wildly towards the reactor, "We need to get away!"

They made a mad dash for it, the flood on their heels. Finally, John

threw himself through the glass windows and into the floor, landing with a thump on the ground. The musty of the smell of the Flood was at his back, and a Flood leaped on him. He unsheathed his omni-blade and stabbed it straight on in the chest, then flung it at a few others. "Fall back!" said Legion, "There's some doors located up that stairway," Legion pointed behind himself.

John waved his men over, and then starting walking backwards up the stairs, as he and Legion held back the tide of Flood. Then they quickly got inside the doors. "Lock that shit down!" yelled Shay. Legion slammed his omni-tool on it and it pulsed red. The noise of the Flood slamming against it remained though.

"They'll just attack from the flanks," a balding, middle-aged man wailed, "We're doomed!"

"No we're not," said John, "How many of us are left?"

John took a look, and besides Shay and Miranda, there were only nine civilians left.

Miranda then spoke, clutching her wounded side, "The man's right though, they will move on the flanks and intercept us at the Reactor Core. We need to double-time it. Then we need to establish a defensive position while someone arms the nuke."

"Legion can take care of that, the rest of us can defend."

Miranda nodded, then groaned as John patched her up with medi-gel, "Thanks, those things aren't contagious are they?"

"Looks like you only got a cut, so I think you'll be fine," he replied. "Lets get moving then."

The Reactor room was as wide as two football fields, and a large metal structure shaped like a fat cylinder had been built in the middle. On either side were power nodes, barrels that glowed red and operated in pairs. Around the Reactor were computer terminals, crates, and back-up power stations, black wires snaking around the floor. The Reactor was closed shut, but John knew the controls would be around here somewhere.

They searched the area for several moments, until Legion said, "Spartan-Commander, I have found the controls to open the Reactor. I will look through the data to find our options."

"Alright, everybody! Get in defensive positions around Legion, defend him at all costs!"

Some of the civilians seemed to be shaking in worry, but they managed to be brave. Nothing came at them yet.

A few minutes later, Legion said, "That is fortunate, but not unexpected."

"What is?"

"Cerberus reputation for extreme measures continues: they built in a self-destruct protocol for the Nuclear Reactor."

John was surprised, "Really?"

"Affirmative, which is logical. It would be the easiest way to make sure their enemies, most notably the Alliance or Reapers, would not get access to vital information."

"Can you set it off?"

"Of course, only problem is that the trigger mechanism to do so can not be activated remotely. One must go inside the Reactor Core. I suspect that this was done in order to make sure nobody would destroy the base without an acceptable reason."

"Its highly radioactive in there!"

"Yes, but thankfully for you, I am a Synthetic and therefore will be unaffected. At the same time though, I will be a carrier of Radiation for the next forty-eight hours, so I would advise you not to make physical contact with my platform."

"Alright, how long will it take?"

Legion paused for a moment, "Five minutes."

"How long will it take for the Reactor to explode?"

"Ten minutes."

John used his comm and called up Cortez, "Cortez!"

"Yes, Commander."

"We need an Evac in six minutes, make your way to the north side of the facility, on the back side of the Comm tower. Do not get too close to the ground though, area is hot."

"Affirmative, coming now."

"Alright, Legion, we'll cover you," ordered John, "Get to it."

Legion ran off to do his job, and John formed a defensive line. He and Garrus moved some crates in order to make a wall for cover, and set up some on the flanks to form a protective circle. However, as soon as they were done, they heard the noises of Flood coming down the hallway, and soon enough, over fifty Flood were bounding at their position.

"OPEN FIRE!" yelled Miranda, as they laid down fields of rounds.

The first wave of Flood were knocked down and collapsed onto the battlefield. But the second wave managed to get up to the fortifications and jumped over. A few were laying down rounds of their own. A civilian dropped next to John, who had to stop and reload. The Flood were overwhelming them on angles.

Miranda let an angry yell, and sent out a field of Biotic energy, that rippled across the Flood attackers, sending them sprawling to the ground. John quickly eliminated them, and then yelled behind himself, "Legion, you almost done back there!"

"Almost, Spartan-Commander, just another minute!"

They managed to keep the Flood off their backs another minute, when a blaring siren erupted from above, and red lights flashed. Legion came running, his body slightly glowing a sickish green. "We must get out of here, Spartan-Commander!"

"Everybody! Push to the exit! Miranda, cover our ass!"

"You got it!"

They moved in concert, slowly moving up as the Flood attacked on all sides. The Flood would sometimes get close enough but Shay would pop up from behind and shoot it down with his Scimitar shotgun, which was equipped with incendiary rounds. One...two...three flood were knocked down and set aflame, crumbling into ashes on the ground. When they came up to the stairs they disbanded formation for only a second, but that was just enough for a Flood to jump off and tackle John to the ground. He rolled down the stairs and looked up at a grim, rotting face, with root-like tentacles growing out of a black gash in its throat.

John tried to pry it off him, but was saved as a shotgun blast took the Flood assailant right in the face, and it stumbled off and burned.

"Thanks," said John to Shay as they both ran out of the building.

"Don't mention it!"

The shuttle came by and swooped around. John didn't see any Flood immediately, but kept his eyes peeled. The shuttle stopped and hovered. He saw Garrus and the children running first into the open doors. Then his civilians. Shay, Miranda and Legion took guard in front of the shuttle as they got in. John felt something wrong in his gut, and his feeling was warranted, when out of the Comm tower nearby, three huge tentacles erupted from the glass and a voice malevolently roared over the shattering glass.

"Take off, Cortez!" yelled John, firing his weapon at the tentacles, to no avail, "Get to safety!"

Cortez drove just as the tentacles tried to snatch him. The Gravemind growled defiantly, "I will **not **allow you to **leave...this... PLANET**!"

"What do we do now?" asked Miranda as the tentacles surrounded them on all sides.

John was at a loss as what to do. "Just keeping shooting," he ordered.

They kept shooting at the tentacles, and tried to dodge them as they swooped around, trying to snatch them up. Unfortunately for Shay, a tentacle got him and he was taken, screaming as he was dragged back to the Comm tower.

"Run back to the Reactor!" said John, "we can try climbing up to the

top level before the nuke detonates! Steve, meet us at the top of the Nuclear Reactor, main building!"

"Will try, those tentacles are going to make things difficult, though."

John watched the shuttle zoom by overhead. Then he saw Garrus get on the gun and start firing at the tentacles. They recoiled a little bit, as the rounds were big enough to do some damage. John, Miranda, and Legion ran forward, and jumped over one of the tentacles to get to the Reactor building. Quickly, they scrambled up staircases and bashed open locked doors. A group of Flood tried to attack them, but got stuck in a narrow corridor, when they tried to pursue _en masse._

John broke through a final door and came on the roof of the building. Only two minutes left before that nuke detonated! The shuttle came around again and the doors swung wide open. "Jump for it!" yelled John

They ran for it. The tentacles came up from behind them, breaking the building in pieces; slabs of concrete and glass falling to the ground in a pile of dust.

They managed to get in just in time. The shuttle was cramped but they could deal with it. "Get the hell out of here!" yelled John, "We might not be able to escape the blast!"

Cortez was dripping sweat from the pressure; he zoomed as fast as he could upwards, breaking through the clouds. John looked out the window and couldn't see anything. But he heard it when it happened, a loud rumble followed by the shuttle shaking a bit.

"We escaped by just a hair," said Cortez, "Had we left a few seconds later, I don't think I could have gotten us high enough."

"Good job Lieutenant," said John.

Everybody but John sat down, taking deep breaths, then smiling at the fact that they were alive. After a few moments, John asked Miranda, "So after this, you think you could help us take on Cerberus?"

Miranda smoothed away a lock of her hair from over her eyes then said, "I need to make sure my sister is safe first."

"She could stay on the Normandy," said John, "Its a Stealth ship, and it won't be involved in fighting until we retake Earth eventually. For the time being, she'll be safe there."

"You got a point," considered Miranda thoughtfully, "Alright, I'll help you out. I've been meaning to pay back the Illusive Man anyway."

John then heard Cortana's voice, fraught with worry, on the comm, "Chief, what went on down there? We lost contact for a while."

"Its a long story Cortana, and you might not even believe this one."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: In a way, I feel somewhat sad that I didn't do more with the Flood, but realistically once the Flood started taking over Reapers, there would be no way for anybody to win anyway, short of building Halo rings of course. And I romanced Miranda in my default personal play-through, and it still baffles me to this day, why she can't become your squad-mate after Horizon, in fact, it makes no sense that if you romance her, why you can't invite her to just stay on the Normandy to keep her safe from Cerberus! Its a Stealth Ship, for God's Sake!

46. All In

****Brothers in Steel Part 45****

****All In****

* * *

><p>"Good job getting that intel," said Admiral Hackett in the QEC room, "I was worried about the mission, too many unknowns, but it seems like you got the job done. Are you sure that this...Flood, was destroyed."<p>

"No sir, not a hundred percent," replied John, "That's why I recommend we call in an orbital bombardment, just to be sure.

Hackett looked thoughtful, scratching his chin, then answered, "Alright, we can evacuate the area and do a purge. But for the moment, we need to focus on our next move: the attack on Cerberus."

"Yes, sir."

"I can rally the fleets to assist you in your attack, but...there'll be no way to disguise our fleet movements from the Reapers for this. Therefore the Crucible will be in danger, and we will need to go on the offensive immediately after you retrieve the Catalyst. All or nothing."

"I understand, sir," John was ready for this.

"Good, then we will set out for the RV point immediately, and wait for you to get there before we attack."

"Then we can knock Cerberus out of this war, once and for all, and start focusing on the Reapers."

"Yes," agreed Hackett, "And hopefully we can keep casualties to a minimum. Hackett out."

* * *

><p>"YOU FOUND WHAT!" yelled Cortana quite loudly. While John had been gone, Cortana had cut her hair short, more similar to how she was when she was just an AI.<p>

"I found the Flood," repeated John. They were in John's cabin, and John was pouring a glass of Serrice Ice Brandy, something he had found in Shepard's fridge. At first he had left it alone, but curiosity and Dr. Chakwas' urging had prompted him to give it a try.

"But...how...we need to warn them...we need..."

John shook his head, "We took care of it. There's no guarantees that they were destroyed a hundred percent, but Hackett's sending a ship to bombard the area."

"Oh..." Cortana looked relieved, "Good, but I would think you would have been more concerned than that!"

"I was, but now that threat is over, and now we have Cerberus to deal with."

"Indeed. What's the plan?"

"Simple," said John, "We go in, and kick their asses."

"I like that plan," Cortana smiled, "But I think it might be more complicated than that."

"Of course. Admiral Hackett is going to provide us with a way in, then we're going to go inside, find the Illusive Man, and retrieve that data. The one that tells us what the Catalyst is."

"Will I be coming?"

"EDI says she has to come, as she is the only one that can get past Cerberus security measures. Miranda wants to come to get revenge on the Illusive Man."

"So just take more than two people?"

John shook his head, "No, operational procedure for special forces here dictates that squads can be made out of no more than three people. I'd have to make up a second squad for that. Actually, that might not be a good idea for when we get back to Earth, but I'd like to limit casualties for now, so I'll just take those two."

Cortana frowned, "I was hoping to fight."

"You will, soon enough."

"You aren't nervous that I can't hold my own, aren't you?"

John was silent.

Cortana said, "I can hold my own, John."

"Alright, then you can fight the Reapers by yourself when we get to...this Earth."

"Good."

* * *

><p>John walked down into the Normandy's gun battery to find Garrus doing his calibrations again. Garrus looked behind him and then said, "Commander, I didn't hear you coming."<p>

"Good," said John, "Need to make sure I'm still stealthy after all these years."

"No offense intended, but its surprising how silent you are even in that big, clunky armor."

"None taken. It surprises me too."

Garrus laughed and then asked, "You need me for something?"

"No, I just wanted to find out if you're ready for what's to come."

"Ever since me and Shepard stopped Sovereign all those years ago, we knew this day would come. Now we're finally here, and I feel content, I feel like we could win this. Only difference is that Shepard's not here with me to do it."

John nodded, "Yes, its always hard to lose friends to war. I've had to lose many over the years."

"Yeah...but I'm ready for coming back to Earth, and Commander, I apologize for the way I acted in the War Room the other day. It was unprofessional."

"Its alright," John replied calmly, "You lost a friend, and things are looking grim. But we can move on from that."

"Thank you, I won't let us fail."

"Good to hear."

* * *

><p>Next, John visited Legion.<p>

"Legion," said John curtly.

"Ah, Spartan-Commander, it is good to see you still function."

"Thanks...I think. What are you doing?"

"Downloading complex algorithms to increase my weapon reload times."

"Sounds like a good use of time. Wish I could do that."

"I have counted over one thousand and twenty-eight pros to being a synthetic over an organic being."

"I see," said John, leaning back on a computer module in the AI core, "Any pros to being an organic over a synthetic?"

"Not as many, but they are there. I can share data if you so desire."

"Go ahead."

Legion explained, "Organics are much harder to override in programming than synthetics. You can still be brainwashed but it takes a long time. We can simply have our code rewritten."

"That's true," conceded John, "What's next?"

"Organics can produce art that has emotional themes in it: we can not."

"Why not, aren't you sentient? Don't you have emotions?"

"Not in the way you do. Possibly in time, that might change, but we are still driven by logic. Everything we create emphasizes function over form, therefore art has no place, as it has no function."

"I see, never had much use for art myself, but how is that an advantage?"

"Art is a medium that allows for self-expression. Sometimes it can explain a concept or a state of mind better than language can," Legion paused, "And therefore we are limited in our expression."

"I guess I never thought of it that way."

"That is because you are militant, though I mean no offense."

"None taken, any others?"

"One more of note: Organics do not know who created them."

"And that's good how?"

Legion did not answer immediately, and looked to the floor. Then he said, "Its difficult to explain."

"I'll try my best to understand, please."

"Alright, it is my belief, and some other Geth that organic ignorance of their creators, if they have any at all, leads them to create social constructs, to create a sort of 'code' if you will. These codes lead organic civilizations to evolve...but not technologically, you only need logic for that."

"So how do they evolve?"

"They evolve in the way they treat one another, they learn not to devalue the lives of living beings, and the responsibilities of their actions and how they will affect others. These social constructs, religion being the primary example, can lead to morals, while illogical...are not entirely worthless. Beings driven solely by logic will only act in their own self-interest. Or in our case, the self-interest of their collective."

John pondered what Legion was trying to say and realized, "Are you saying that Synthetics, since they know who created them, don't believe in any higher power? That they only need to rationalize what they do?"

"Yes, and we have not been able to determine whether or not organic morality is a weakness or a strength. There have been examples on both sides that are in favor of both arguments."

"I see." John looked at his omni-tool for the time then said, "Well I think I best be going. Thanks for the talk, Legion."

"Affirmative."

* * *

><p>James was in the hangar, just checking and double checking his equipment. James saluted John when he came down, and John returned it. Then he asked James, "Ready for the end of this?"<p>

"Before you came around, Silencio, I was on Earth when the Reapers hit. The one thing I wanted to do more than anything was stay and fight, and Shepard made me come with. I realized then that I needed to go with him, but ever since then, I've been itching to get back to Earth, just need to get through Cerberus to do it."

"I know what that's like," agreed John, "What do you rate our chances of winning?"

"Ehh.." said James uncertainly, "Not very good, but that doesn't mean I'm scared, one way or another this is all going to end in two days."

"I suppose it is, you're a good soldier, Vega."

"You're not too bad yourself, Silencio, I mean...sir," James laughed.

"I don't mind the name, its grown on me."

"Good, now we have to work on getting you to laugh."

"That might be harder to do."

James laughed again, "Alright, well, holler if you need me to do some killing or anything."

"Will do," John took his leave.

* * *

><p>Finally, John went down to engineering to make his last visit before the final mission, and that was to see Tali. The two of them had never actually had a one on one conversation, mostly because they hadn't had time before Thessia, and after Thessia, because of Shepard's death, and the awkward truth that John had basically stepped into her boyfriend's role. But John wanted to make sure his crew was completely committed and ready for what was to come, and that was his job as Commander, much like when he was Squad Leader of the Spartans.<p>

He walked up and coughed. She turned around to face him. It was strangely disconcerting to be the one not being able to see through a

mask, as usually people had been looking at him that way. But she merely said politely, "Hello, Commander, can I help you?"

"No, I'm fine. I was just coming down to check on what its like down here. Are you well equipped?"

"Yes, of course, the Normandy remains a state of the art vessel, ever since Sh-...I helped stop the Collectors."

"Good. I've been just been trying to get a read of the crew's thoughts about the next mission. Do you feel ready?"

Tali looked over to the engineers nearby, Adams, Donnelly and Daniels, then waved a hand gesturing over to the Tantalus Drive Core that was pulsing blue and purple nearby. John followed her, realizing that she obviously wanted to be out of earshot for them.

"When I first came on the Normandy and asked Shepard about you, the answer I got was a little confusing," explained Tali, "You were a seven foot tall man with a suit like nothing I had ever seen before and an aptitude for killing, I asked Shepard 'where the hell did you pick up this one' and he tried to explain about how you claimed to come from an alternate dimension and such, but I didn't believe him. And that's why when Shepard died, I lost all hope, not only because the..." she choked up a little bit, "the man I love was gone, but all our hope for winning against the Reapers gone as well. But now that time has passed, and we dealt with Cerberus on Sanctuary, maybe its not time to give up hope just yet."

"I didn't want Shepard to go either, I certainly didn't ask for the job," explained John gently, "But I have to follow regulation. After we're done with this, I'll probably have to give it up anyway, and everything will be in its proper place."

"Yes. And about Cerberus, I'd like to come and shut them down, if you don't mind. I know Miranda and EDI both said they should go, but you have to bring me along, so I can put a shotgun blast into the head of the man that killed Shepard."

She said this rather fiercely, and for some reason, John was perturbed. However, all he did was slowly nod and say, "Alright then, I'll give it some thought," then he left.

* * *

><p>John spent the rest of the day in the armory doing physical fitness regimens, such as push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, and weight-lifting to keep himself in tip-top shape. However, he received a message on his omni-tool from Liara asking if he could meet her up in his cabin, as she had gone up there once already and found that he was not there. John stopped working out, eased out the tension in his neck, and put a white tanktop over his sweaty body, waving goodbye to James as he passed on by.<p>

Once he got up into his room, he saw Liara already waiting for him, sitting on his couch, looking at a datapad with interest. Then she looked up at him and smiled, "John!"

"You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, I noticed you going about the crew, but you didn't come to see me?"

"You looked busy, I didn't want to disturb you."

"Well, I want to disturb you," she said slyly.

"Alright," said John, "I'll play, what's on your mind?"

"This is it, you may not have been around as long as us, but I've been waiting for this moment for a while. The Reapers are a tough enemy, do not underestimate them."

"I'm not thinking this is what you wanted to talk about, are you scared?"

Liara laughed nervously, "I'm always scared, but I try not to let it show."

"Same here, though I've had more practice than you, I'm sure."

Liara smiled, "Is that so?"

"I know so," John replied and sat down on his bed.

"The point is," continued Liara, now standing up, "There's a good chance we might not get out of this alive, and I have...feelings for you, strong feelings."

"I know, and I feel the same."

"That's good," she sat down on the bed next to him, and took his much larger hand into her small, blue one, "So that's why I want to take our relationship to the next level."

It took John a moment to understand, squinting his eyes and looking confused, then it all came to him, "Oh!" he said in a tone of surprise, "Oh."

"Is that not what you want?"

"No, of course not, just uh...well, I never thought...uh..." for the first time in his life Spartan 117 was at a loss for a respectable comeback.

"Have you never been with anybody like that, John?"

John bowed his head and said, "No, there was always a war going on, something else more important I had to do...I never thought I could settle down."

"After we win this fight, well, provided we win this fight, there will be years of peace ahead of us. You'll have to get used to it then."

"You're right, well I'm ready, lets share this night together."

Liara leaned into him and they shared a long, passionate kiss, which led to Liara pushing him down, and her leading him through the

rest.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: NO I WILL NOT MAKE A LIARA x MASTER CHIEF LOVE SCENE IN FULL DETAIL SO DON'T EVEN ASK

47. Cerberus

Brothers in Steel Part 46

Cerberus

* * *

><p>They were in the belly of the beast.<p>

John had led Tali and EDI into the heart of the Cerberus headquarters while the Fifth Fleet provided support outside, bombing the place relentlessly. Every so often John's feet would shake from the impact of a round against the hull of the fortress. They had passed through wave after wave of Cerberus trooper, each one throwing their life away in a fruitless attempt to delay John so that they could set up better defenses in front of the main operations center. But that had been to no avail, and now John and his crew had entered a large, cavernous room, low-lit and shadowed by a strange structure.

"Keelah..." breathed Tali.

"What is it?" asked John.

"Its the human-Reaper we killed when we took out the Collectors. The Collectors were taking human colonists, processing them into a raw genetic paste, and turning into that."

"Abominable," said John, "But interesting."

"Shepard decided to save the place, he thought that the advances would help us fight against the Reapers."

"Probably why Cerberus got indoctrinated," suggested John.

Tali said nothing, she knew it was true.

There was a series of rafters leading up to the top of the hall, where they could make their way to where they needed to go. But no sooner had they set foot onto the metal platform, then Cerberus troops began to rope down from the ceiling, weapons in hand. A few Phantoms also appeared above them, and John readied his shotgun. "Lets move," he ordered his squad.

There wasn't much cover on the rafters, so John had EDI use a chain overload on the group of Phantoms. A bolt of electricity shot out of her omni-tool and hit the lead Phantom in the chest, then spread to all of them. All their shields were knocked out and they were electrocuted to death, their bodies becoming little more than smoking husks.

John rolled forward and threw a Frag grenade into a crowd of Cerberus troopers, and shattered them apart. One of them even fell over the railing, screaming to his death as he plummeted into the side of the Human-Reaper. John used the lull of the battle to climb up to another level, when he saw the pinpoint of a laser sight pop on his HUD. Quickly he turned his back to the fire, and felt the sting of a round hit his MJOLNIR armor. His shields took most of the blow, leaving him with a little left, and so he kept climbing.

Another level followed, and finally John got on the sniper. He shot the sniper once with his Scimitar, taking out the shields in a flash, and then followed up with another that ripped apart the Sniper's body-suit in a splash of blood and gore, and sent him overboard as well. They had reached the top, and John found himself looking into the face of a very disturbing creature, that looked somewhat like a human skeleton, only with four eyes instead of two.

"We're done," announced EDI.

"Good, I hope we're almost there," said Tali.

The next room they went into was a long hallway.

At the end of it was a door, with a height advantage.

They moved towards it, and then breached the door. What they came into was a long, semi-circular viewing room, with a long glass window. There was a series of holographic panels in front of a lone chair at the very front of the room, and the floor seemed to be completely covered in metallic reflective plates. There was an eerie vibe about the place; John didn't like it, and gripped his gun tighter as he led his squad closer to the panels.

John gestured to EDI, "EDI get on that chair and find the data we need."

"Aye."

EDI started looking around on the chair, and Tali looked over at a panel, until John heard a cold, menacing voice from behind him say, "John. What a pleasant surprise."

John turned around to see a flickering blue hologram of the Illusive Man, looking not too different from their last meeting on the Citadel.

"You," was John's simple reply.

"It appears as if you've stepped into some large boots. Can't say I'm surprised, the Alliance is so desperate and when a Super-soldier from a supposed other Realm comes along, how could they say no?"

"Where's the Catalyst?"

"Its there."

"Then I have nothing more to say to you," said John, turning his back on him.

"How disappointing, Shepard would have least had the courtesy to give

another pointless argument about Control over Destroy. But...maybe you actually agree, maybe Control is right? I don't know, what do you think?"

John didn't answer him, instead, he looked to EDI, "Have you found it?"

"Yes."

"We're done here," said John to the Illusive Man, "Where are you?"

"Why do you think I should tell you that?"

"If you surrender now, I will bring you in for trial and maybe you'll get to live. If you don't, you might get killed by the Reapers."

"I've always preferred risks to caution," explained the Illusive Man dryly, "I can see you are the same."

John didn't bother to reply. His attention was now on the Cerberus Swordsman, Kai Leng, who had just appeared in the room. John immediately opened fire with his Avenger, pouring rounds on the nimble assassin. Kai Leng hopped around, dodging the fire in an elegant dance of poise and balance. John found it difficult to get a lock on the man, until the man was right up in his face, about to slash him with his strange sword.

Reflexively, John kicked the man lighting fast with his foot into the man's pelvis. John heard the sick crunch of bone and hear the man scream in agony. Kai Leng was going to die from a nutshot. How humiliating.

"How?" asked Tali in shock.

"I was built with lightning quick reflexes," said John without any hint of emotion, "I just reacted." Kai Leng was spitting and groaning as he writhed around on the floor.

John looked him over and pulled out his Hand Cannon, "Do you think we have time to take him to the authorities?" he asked EDI.

"Not likely."

John took a look at Tali, and said to her softly, "Do you want to do it?"

She walked over to Kai Leng, and looked over at his pathetic whimpering. His face was stained with tears of pain, and his body shook violently. Tali shook her head, then cocked her shotgun. She lowered it with one hand over the Swordsman's face and said, "This is for Shepard, you bosh'tet."

She shot him. His face exploded. Kai Leng was dead.

"Well that's done," said John, "Open up that VI."

Vendetta reappeared again, looking not at all surprised. "Greetings," it said.

"Alright, where's the Catalyst?" demanded John.

"It is what you call the Citadel."

"Seriously?"

"Yes, the Crucible will attach to the Citadel. In layman's terms, it uses the Reapers' technology against them, as the energy produced by the Crucible will shoot out to the Mass Relay system, from which the Citadel is the center of."

"Alright, is it safe to use?"

"To the best of our knowledge, yes."

"Well, I guess we better tell Hackett..."

"That is not a possibility."

"Why not?"

"The one you call the Illusive Man fled to the Citadel recently, and has warned the Reapers of your intent. They have taken possession and moved it."

"Moved it?" asked John in disbelief, "Moved it where?"

"To the system you refer to as Sol."

"Earth?" asked Tali.

"Apparently," answered John, "What tactical advantage does that give them? Why don't they just take the Citadel back to wherever they came from, where we can't get them?"

"Unknown, but the Reapers do not act without reason. There must be a motive here that we cannot hope to comprehend," said Vendetta calmly.

"Alright," said John, "We better go tell Hackett. Do you want out, or do you want to be destroyed?"

"My time is over, it is up to you to warn the next cycle."

"We're not going to have to, we're going to win this, even if it kills me."

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Yeah, I know this was short, but I just want to get to Earth now, its going to be epic.

48. Anderson

Brothers in Steel Part 47

Anderson

* * *

><p>Admiral Hackett had boarded the Normandy, which was now resting at the front of the Sword Fleet, poised to strike from the Horsehead Nebula. However, the recent news of the Citadel's movement had stopped the go ahead for the assault to deliver the Crucible.<p>

"Commander Spartan," said Hackett to John, in the QEC room, "This is Admiral Anderson. He's leading the resistance on Earth."

John saluted immediately and said, "Admiral on Deck!"

"At ease," said Anderson wearily. Anderson was a tall, sturdy, african-american with a voice so deep and...manly, there was no other word for it. "I heard about your attack on the Cerberus base on Horizon. Damned good work, Shepard would have been proud."

"Thank you sir."

"But the intel from the Anadius system is troubling. The Citadel is indeed poised over Earth, right over London."

"What are they doing with it?"

"They're using a beam of some sort to transport humans, alive or dead, to the Citadel."

"For what purpose?"

"Shepard said that they used humans to create a prototype Human Reaper in the Collector Base, before he destroyed it of course. That's probably what they are doing now. Goddamn abomination."

John nodded, though he did not understand how you could make a Reaper out of dead humans, and replied, "So what's the plan now?"

Hackett turned to face John and said, "We can't defeat the Reapers without the Crucible, not conventionally. We have no other choice, we need to take back the Citadel."

"Only problem is," added Anderson gravely, "Is that the Citadel's arms have closed up. You'd need to find some way to put them back up."

"If a small strike team could get on the Citadel and open the arms, we could have a chance at attaching the Crucible to it."

"I could do that," said John, "But how would we get there? Shuttlecraft?"

"No, you'd have to take that beam up to the Citadel."

John didn't like the sound of that, but before he could say anything, Anderson said, "Its the only shot we got. The Reapers will be on Earth in force, but if you can take out the Hades Cannons, they're big Destroyers that act as anti-air craft, you could land a ground force to assault the Beam."

"Respectfully sir," said John, "But how do we know that the Beam will

work for us? And what if the Reapers turn it off?"

"He has a point," said Hackett, "What if they do that?"

"What other choice do we have?"

John thought about it a moment, then remembered something he had read when going through some of Liara's files on the computer she had given him. "Ilos," he said.

"What?" said Hackett, surprised.

"Three years ago, Shepard used a miniature mass relay on Ilos, built by the Protheans, to get on to the Citadel and stop the Rogue Spectre, Saren. Is that thing still working?"

"The Conduit?" answered Anderson, "Why yes, we had a scientific team working on it for the last couple years, but we've lost contact with them when the Reaper invasion front hit."

"If we could get to the Conduit," said John boldly, "Then we could use that to get on the Citadel. It would be a safer way to get there, without the Reapers stopping us."

"But I thought that the Citadel controlled the Mass Relay Network?" asked Hackett, confused, "Wouldn't the Reapers know about it?"

"No," said Anderson, "The Protheans built it without the Reapers knowledge. Hopefully, they have not corrected their mistake. Its still a long-shot, but less of a long-shot than what I had initially suggested, good thinking Commander."

"The Normandy can get there without anybody knowing until its too late," said John, "When we get there, I'll signal you to begin the assault with the fleets."

"Alright, we'll wait, but don't be too long, otherwise the Reapers might make the first move, and we can't stand against them for long."

"I understand sir," John saluted again, "I'll make every shot count."

"Dismissed everybody," said Hackett, returning the salute, "And Commander, three things."

"Yes, sir!"

"First, you've done a good job as acting Commander of the Normandy. So I'm letting you remain here, saves time, and besides, you're seven feet tall and with that armor, nothing's going to live if they stand in your way. Second, Miranda Lawson? Can she be trusted? I know she was working with Cerberus."

John thought about it and said, "Shepard seemed to trust her, and she hasn't been with Cerberus for six months."

"Very well, but keep an eye on her. We'll take care of her sister, get her to safety," said Hackett.

"Thank you, sir."

"Lastly, I'm placing Major Alenko, one of my staff with you for this mission. He's a powerful asset, a biotic, and he'll be an excellent addition to your team. He'll also know how to bring those Citadel doors open, since he's a Spectre. However, being a Spectre, he technically outranks you, so if he insists on belaying a command order, you'll have to follow it. However, he won't be a trouble."

"I understand, sir."

"Good, I have to get back to my ship. Any questions?"

"None, sir."

"Good, Hackett out."

* * *

><p>Kaidan Alenko was a middle aged man, with jet black hair curled up in a kind of puff at the front, and a face that was covered with a light field of stubble. John didn't know exactly how the Spectre chain of command worked, but the man had been a major, which outranked John so John saluted him.<p>

Kaidan seemed to be taken aback, and said, "At ease," the two shook hands. Alenko was already suited up in his armor, but John realized that it seemed to have elements of the MJOLNIR armor in it, the same mesh underlay and design aesthetic. It wasn't true MJOLNIR armor however, otherwise Kaidan would have been dead by now, but John realized that this was the result of Alliance scientists studying John's suit.

"I see my armor didn't go to waste in that lab," commented John.

"What do you mean?" asked Kaidan.

"My armor was the...prototype for what you're wearing now," John didn't know if Kaidan knew about John's claim of being from an another universe, so he decided not to mention it just in case.

"Its damned fine stuff, shield is one hundred percent more efficient than what we have already. Hopefully, they'll be able to apply it to everybody."

Kaidan and John walked to the bridge of the Normandy, where Joker was waiting. Joker saluted and then said, "Good to see you back, Kaidan."

"You too, Joker, though I wish it was under better circumstances," Kaidan turned to John, "I heard about what happened to Shepard, and that's why you're in charge. Heard about your take out of Sanctuary and the Cerberus base. So I guess Shepard got the right person for the job."

"Thank you, he was a good man though, I didn't want to replace him."

"I'm sure, but he'd want us to finish the fight. He saved my life you

know."

John nodded, "I read the mission report of Virmire. That was a tough situation."

"It sure was. I was left to guard the nuke, the Gunnery Chief that was with us, Gunnery Chief Williams, was with the Salarians that made up the other team," Kaidan cracked his knuckles reflexively, "Shepard couldn't run to save us both. He reasoned that the bomb was more important."

John nodded. He would have made the same choice, if he had been there.

"Oh well, what's done is done," finished Kaidan, "I know you know I'm a Spectre, but you have tactical command here. I'll follow your orders, unless there's something I really, really feel is wrong. But from what I'm heard, I think we'll be just fine...well as fine as you can get when going up against the largest collection of Reaper forces in the known galaxy."

John felt a slight surge of shock, "There's that many Reapers at Ilos?"

"Oh no," reassured Kaidan, "I meant at Earth. We will be going to the Citadel after all."

"Oh, well that's good. Flight Lieutenant Moreau!" ordered John with a bark.

"Yes sir!"

"Get us to Ilos, its time to end this war, once and for all."

"Aye, aye sir!" replied Joker happily as he punched in the coordinates, and the ship began to dash for the nearest mass relay.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: Sorry this took so long to get out, considering how short it was. I just didn't have the motivation for this story until yesterday.

49. Ilos

****Brothers in Steel Part 48****

****Ilos****

* * *

><p>The Normandy entered the Refuge system within the next four hours. John stood on the bridge of the Normandy with Kaidan and Liara, and asked Joker, "What's the status of the Reaper forces in this system?"<p>

"You're not going to like it sir," explained Joker warily, pointing over to some glowing orange display screens in front of him, "There

are over twenty Reaper signatures in orbit, a few Sovereign class ones, but mostly Destroyers, orbiting the planet, and two on the ground. They definitely are up to something, around the same coordinates that the Conduit was when we went here three years ago. They've landed some ground forces. I can get you down there, but they're bound to notice us up close."

John thought about it for a moment, "Can we take the shuttle?"

"We can," said EDI, "But we'll have to land about four clicks away, the jungle and Reaper forces are too thick around the Conduit. If you don't, then the shuttle will probably be shot down by the Harvesters in the area."

"What about the Conduit?" asked John, "Can you read if its still operational?"

"No, but that doesn't mean its offline. In fact, I would hazard a guess as that the Reapers are in the process of securing it to move troops onto the Citadel."

"Alright, we'll take the shuttle and land away from the Conduit. I'll take a team down with me. Then Cortez will come back, and you, Joker, will take the Normandy back to the Sword fleet. Can you do without the Reapers seeing you?"

"No, but I should be able to outrun them."

"That will have to do." John thought about who he should take with him, then decided, "Cortana, Alenko, lets suit up and get down there!"

Liara stopped John by putting a hand on his shoulder and demanded, "Why can't I come?"

"Too dangerous, stay here and assist with the attack on the Crucible, in any way you can."

Liara looked like she had more to say, but she held back her tongue. John knew that she wanted to say that she should come, so that she would be with John if anything bad happened to him, but Liara knew he was in command. She didn't want to undermine his authority. So she simply nodded and said in a choked voice, "Please be careful."

"I will," John promised, and he and his team went off.

* * *

><p>The shuttle zipped through the rust colored skies of Ilos, and touched down on a patch of grass between two large forests of black, twisted trees. The trees looked like the tentacles of some great squid, writhing and enveloping the ruins that were spread out all around. The ruins reminded John of the Mayan civilization that he had learned about a long time ago in school on Reach. They looked ancient, worn, as if they were part of the world itself, yet he could see inorganic elements in the design as well. This had once been a great city. This was a tropical world too, with warm air all around.<p>

"Lets move out," John ordered. He and his team traversed into the

forest. They moved in a spread out formation. Cortana took the left, Kaidan took the right, John was in the front. Cortana had gotten her own suit of armor with adequate shielding. She also had time to style her hair, and now it was a light shade of violet, like her avatar had possessed, when she was nothing more than an AI. It was technically against regulation, but she wasn't human, and John had bigger things to worry about.

Finally, they reached a much larger structure hidden in the trees. The sunlight fell through the canopy, and shafts of dim light fell onto the forest floor. A courtyard was spread out below them, and John could see several Marauders, over thirty Cannibals, and four or five brutes, standing around. They all seemed completely aimless or not even reacting to the world around them. But then again, that made sense, John thought, because they were nothing more than inorganic zombies. They must have been a rear guard, as John could see a structure that kind of looked like an elevator over at the end.

"Alenko," said John, "Move around their right flank, Cortana, go around their left. I'll take up the front."

Cortana was armed with a Tempest Submachine gun, and a Predator pistol as her sidearm. Kaidan had an Argus Assault Rifle, and a Phalanx pistol at his side. Both of them nodded as they received their orders, and then moved off to the sides of the courtyard, taking cover behind antique stone walls. John moved in forward.

With a whirr of surprise, one of the Marauders turned its machine gun to bear on John, and immediately started laying down a stream of fire.

John threw a grenade, shattering the turian Reaper's legs, and felling it to the ground. The Brutes roared and stuttered, moving towards John like a herd of great apes. Alenko fired his Argus, and John could hear the click of machinery each time the gun cycled its rounds. Cortana supported from the left as well, mowing down Cannibals with her weapons, and using her omni-tool to freeze and fry moving targets as well.

Then John heard a screech, and a flash of dark purple appeared on top of his HUD. His shields went out a moment as a blaze of energy hit nearby, and he rolled sideways into cover. A Reaper Harvester had appeared on the battlefield, and John smelled acrid smoke and rotting flesh.

The Harvester turned its insect-like head and fired its main guns, its bat-like wings flapping up and down as it did so. "Concentrate fire on that son of a bitch!" yelled John as he was pinned down.

A field of blue and purple energy rippled around Alenko's skin, and he fired a wave of Biotic energy at the Harvester. The impact rippled and broke apart some of the beast's armor. Cortana fired an incineration shot, and the resulting impact formed an explosion that ripped apart the creature's torso. It slumped down to the ground, dead. Only a few more Marauders and Cannibals were left, and the three of them mopped them up pretty easily.

John was about to call it all clear, when a Reaper Destroyer, as large as a skyscraper, slammed down to the ground above them.

"Get inside!" yelled Alenko, firing at the creature's legs without result.

John and Cortana ran towards the elevator, and John slammed his fist on a terminal nearby. The door took a few seconds to open. Hordes of more Reaper troops landed from underneath the Destroyer, and started firing without pause. John's shields became bathed in heat and mass accelerator rounds.

Finally, the doors swung open, and John's team rushed in. John fell in behind just as his shields fell. The door swung back closed, and the elevator whisked them away underground to safety.

* * *

><p>"Cortez, do you read me?" asked John as the elevator took them deeper into the facility.<p>

There was no answer.

"EDI, can you get a track on Cortez?"

"Flight Lieutenant Cortez was shot down by Reaper Harvesters while leaving the area. I'm sorry, Commander."

John cursed himself. That death was on him.

Cortana put a hand on John's shoulder and said, "Its not your fault."

"No it is. But we'll make them pay for it."

Finally, the elevator came to a stop, in another courtyard, where blocks of stone were strewn about in piles. There were even thicker bunches of trees all around, but John could see a large building in front of them, like a garage, and its door was open.

"This is going to be somewhat of a walk," said Kaidan, "Last time we had the Mako, but it still took a while to get to the Conduit."

"Alright, Normandy, get back to the Fleet now, we're going in. You'll know whether or not we succeeded within the hour. And Liara..." he paused, "When we get back, I'll take you out for Octopus. John out."

Cortana looked confused. "I'll tell you later," John said.

True to what Kaidan had said, it was a long walk. They went down a seemingly endless corridor with high walls, where on either side, there were strange, tube like things sticking out of the grimy walls.

"Stasis pods," explained Kaidan, "When we came here last time, we found out that the Protheans had used this place to keep the survivors of the Reaper invasion alive in cryogenic suspension. However, the Reapers took longer then the survivors anticipated to leave. In the end, the Prothean VI that ran the place, started killing off some of the Protheans to save energy, until only a few

scientists were left."

John's lips hardened into a grim line. Unfortunately, that was sometimes the methods you had to employ to ensure that you got the job done.

Finally, after a half hour of running, they moved out of the indoor halls, and moved out into what seemed like an outdoor canal. Water ran downhill, and vines hung off the sides. The smell of dirt and smoke mingled in on the air, and John could hear the sound of Reapers off in the distance. They were nearby, which meant they had found the Conduit.

"Look!" said Cortana, pointing over at what appeared to be a vehicle of some sort.

It was small, with seats for four, and it had the appearance of a large SUV, crossed with the Kodiak shuttle. It had four wheels, and an open-air cab.

"Anderson did say there had been scientists here, they must have used this to get back and forth from the dig site," said John, "Lets take it."

Within five seconds, Cortana had hot-wired the vehicle, and they were speeding on their way down the sloping riverbed.

"Alenko," asked John, "Do you know anything about activating this thing?"

"No," replied the Spectre, "But I'm guessing our Reaper friends have done that for us."

"He's right," said Cortana, "Look."

She pointed out a large structure at the bottom of a hill, right at the edge of a cliff. John didn't realize it at first, but he took a closer look with his optics, and realized that it was indeed a mass relay! It had the same look of a pair of tweezers, made of bright blue metal, and a spinning set of rings at its base, that glowed with crackling blue energy. And all around it were three large Reapers, the top of their heads touching the skies. These were the two kilometer ones. They blared.

"How do we use that thing?"

"All we need to do is drive it to the Conduit, and we'll get beamed over there. Of course, that's easier said than done, considering all those Reapers there," said Alenko dryly.

John thought about the odds for a moment, then asked, "We're doing it. Hopefully they can't keep up with the reflexes of a Spartan. Buckle your seat-belts, if there are any, because this is going to be a bumpy ride."

John floored it.

The little maintenance car sped down the hill. Cortana and Kaidan were glued to their seats, rattling violently back and forth. John then saw the great red lasers shoot out from the eyes of the Reapers.

Each one came close to John, but he managed to react in time to dodge out of the way. Though each time the air around him heated and he lost his shields. That was enough though. The Reapers kept trying but he managed to bob and weave through the chaos.

John could barely believe it himself, but it looked like he was going to make it after all.

Then a blare like nothing John had ever heard erupted from behind him. John looked behind and saw the largest Reaper he had ever seen, one with glowing golden eyes, and tentacles that seemed to hold the sky in its clutches, appear. A laser shot out of its eyes, and zoomed to the back of the car.

The car flipped upwards, the front smashing into the ground, pieces of debris flying everywhere.

John's shields were gone, and he rolled along the ground, his helmet going face first into the ground and dirt. The force of the impact cracked his visor. John quickly wiped the dirt off himself. The Conduit was only a few feet nearby. He swung his head around, and saw Kaidan lying on the ground nearby. But he didn't have time to look for Cortana, as the three Reapers in front were already preparing to fire.

With every amount of speed he could muster, he dashed for the Conduit, and ran into the blue light that enveloped it. What followed was numbness followed by a dark cold...and then nothing.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: THE BATTLE FOR ALL TIME BEGINS NEXT CHAPTER, BUCKLE YOUR SEAT-BELTS IF THERE ARE ANY, BECAUSE ITS GOING TO BE A BUMPY RIDE. Also, yes that was Harbinger.

50. Crucible Part I

****Brothers in Steel Part 49****

****Crucible Part I****

* * *

><p>John woke up a little bit later, his eyes blurry. He was on the ground, on the Presidium it looked like. Above him he could see the arms of the citadel, still glowing with the lights of the city, but behind them, he could see in the background the outline of Earth, shining radiantly in its blue and green glory.<p>

"Chief," said Cortana on his left, "We made it."

John looked to her and was shocked to see what had happened to her. The entire lower half of her body had been torn off, leaving only wires and circuits falling out like entrails on an organic being. She was still alive though and functional, which John was grateful for.

"Cortana," asked John with worry, "What happened?"

"The laser from the big Reaper grazed me, but that was enough to split me in two. I landed close to you, though you didn't see me. I watched you get in, then I followed, crawling."

"How come the Reapers didn't take care of you?"

"No idea. Maybe they presumed I wasn't a threat? Either way that seems careless, but I can barely move. I had to drag myself up here. I found you, you were unconscious. But that was about fifteen minutes ago."

John quickly stood up and said, "We need to contact the fleets."

John turned on his omni-tool and quickly pinged Admiral Hackett. The signal however, couldn't reach. It was being blocked.

"Signal's being blocked somehow."

"I figured that might happen, we need to figure out a way to disable it," explained Cortana, "Carry me over to a extranet terminal, and I'll hack in to see if I can get what we need."

John picked up Cortana's remains and walked over to a public extranet terminal on the side of the wall. She used her omni-tool to patch in and then said a few seconds later, "John, I got a feed on some security levels near the Citadel Tower. There's a jamming station there. Take it out, and there will be a short break in the entire network, might be long enough for you to get a quick message out."

"Alright I'll head there and take it out."

"Its guarded by over a hundred Reaper forces, mostly Cannibals and Marauders though."

"I'll take care of them equally, don't worry. Did Major Alenko come out at all?"

"No chief, he's most likely dead. We could wait but..."

"No time, hopefully he survived like you did."

"You'll need me to hack anything, but...I'm not moving anywhere," she said dryly, "Looks like I'll need to get back in that chip again."

John had saved the chip just in case of emergencies. This qualified. "Sorry that you didn't get much time to get used to your legs."

"Oh well, what are you going to do? Yank me."

Following Cortana's instruction, he removed her from the body and inserted her back in his head. A cool sensation followed, and the familiar presence of Cortana in his mind returned. "Welcome back," was all John said.

"Strangely, good to be back. Now lets get moving."

There was nobody around on the citadel, nobody but the Keepers, who

showed no interest in John as he walked by them. Their insectile limbs were always doing something, usually engaged at a terminal or picking up refuse and rubble from the Citadel streets.

According to the extranet, over thirteen million people lived on the Citadel, so where did they all go? John hoped that there would be at least some survivors, but maybe that wasn't the case. The Reapers had had a day after all. John saw a few bodies every now and then, but they seemed oddly removed as well.

He remembered what Anderson said, about the Reapers taking humans alive and dead, up to the Citadel. But he couldn't see any sign of what they were doing with them.

The Citadel tower appeared on the horizon, a large monolith standing at the edge of a pristine lake, now full of burning slag and fuselage from sky cars that probably were shot out of the sky. A large group of Reapers, mostly Cannibals and Marauders, were present outside the tower.

"Where's that jamming device?"

"At the top level of the Citadel tower, right underneath where the Council holds its sessions. From what I can gather...it looks like its always been there..."

"A Reaper device underneath the Council all this time? That couldn't have been good."

"I'm surprised the Council wasn't indoctrinated."

"Maybe they were, maybe that's why Shepard had to appeal to the leadership of the species. Or maybe the Reapers had some other motive for it. I don't know."

"Lets just get over there."

John took off his Avenger Assault Rifle from off his back and started heading over to the enemy. He took cover behind some gardens, and slowly leaned around the corner. A group of Marauders were nearby. John picked up a rock and threw it in the other direction. The noise distracted the Marauders, and two of them left the main group to go check it out. John took the initiative, and switched over to the right side, the Marauders' backs to him. He then mantled over the gardens, and used his omni-blade to silently take out one of them. The other two spun at the noise, but John quickly took them out at point-blank range, and they were no more.

Unfortunately, everybody else was alerted. But John now had access to a fallen weapon. He picked up the Reaper Blackstar from off the ground nearby. He had heard from James that it was a lucky find, as it could take out a whole platoon of Reapers in one shot, or even a Harvester. It was a weapon that looked like a miniature Reaper ship, but fired one hell of a shot. There was no way to know how many shots it had in it.

John jumped on top of a large rock and saw a huge wave of Marauders and Cannibals coming towards him, limping and running over a shallow pool of water near some fountains. The salty stench of dead Hanar nearby the pool was pungent in the air, as well the acrid odor of

smoke from the destruction of the area.

John held the trigger of the Blackstar and watched as a red glow appeared from the tip. Then, it got so big that John let go, and a huge pulse of energy flew from him, knocking him back a little.

The Blackstar bolt shot right into the center of their ranks, and a huge explosion that heated the air around John and melted several statues and bodies, fanned out into the Reapers. They were incinerated on impact, the ones farther away melted a little. John had just taken care of fifty percent of the enemies he needed to fight. He put the Blackstar on his back, just in case.

John moved towards the door and opened it, taking the long elevator ride up to the top. He pulled out his primary weapon again, reloaded, and then took the side of the door as soon as the elevator came to a stop. The doors swung wide and John leaned around and saw...nothing.

John moved in quietly, taking cover every so often behind an ornamental rock or tree. There was a strange calm to everything. Where were the Reaper troops that were supposed to be here? John felt oddly uneasy, but kept moving very slowly.

Finally, he came up to the end of the chamber. The delegation pedestal was in front of him, and underneath it, John could see a room down below a field of broken glass, the shards resting dangerously on the grass and trees below. Nearby was a orb-like machine, pulsing with purple energy. The Reaper jammer, and surrounding it, were several dead Reapers, including two Ravagers, their incubator sacks popped and leaking vile fluids.

"Somebody was here," noted Cortana.

"Yeah."

"How are you going to destroy that thing?"

"With this, obviously," John pulled out the Darkstar and aimed it at the jamming device. But as he was about to pull the trigger, his body seized up and he felt paralyzed.

Something had taken hold of him, and immense pressure was mounting in on his head, crushing him like a nut in a nutcracker. John had never known pain like this before, and believe me, he had dealt with some horrific pain before many times.

"I underestimated you John," said a cold voice from behind him, "You managed to get this far."

John watched as the Illusive Man appeared, an aura of dark energy swirling around his body like some kind of satanic cloak. John managed to spit out a simple, "You."

"Yes, I told you before, Control is the means for survival. Yet you fail to understand...actually, I think you do understand, but you feel like siding with me would be a betrayal, wouldn't it?"

John said nothing.

"With the Crucible, humanity can be so much more, can't you see? With the Reaper's powers, we can become gods!"

John had a reply to that, "You haven't earned this power."

"No, because power is something you can't earn, its something you have to take!"

John said nothing.

"Well, I suppose this is it then," the Illusive Man waved his arm, and John felt himself taking the pistol from his holster and raising it up to his head. John tried to fight it, Cortana was screaming in his ear not to do it, but he was not in control of himself.

"Good-bye, John Spartan," said the Illusive Man as John's finger groped the trigger.

John pulled the trigger.

The sound deafened his ears, and he could hear the beeping of his MJOLNIR armor telling him his shields were out. The control the Illusive Man had given was lifted. The Illusive Man was in shock, his mouth agape. "How?"

John wasted no time. He acted out of reflex and shot the Illusive Man right in the forehead. The Illusive Man crashed on the floor...dead.

"My armor...is a lot better than yours." Only a a precise hit to the visor and through the eyes could kill a Spartan in one shot with a pistol. Sniper rifles, Battle Rifles, larger weapons would have seen John dead, but a pistol? And a Predator at that? It was a good thing the Illusive Man hadn't known that.

"Well..." said Cortana, trying to act normal, "That was something."

51. Crucible Part 2

Brothers in Steel Part 50

Crucible Part 2

* * *

><p>"Better stand back," recommended Cortana.<p>

"I know what I'm doing," replied John, holding up the Blackstar and aiming at the Reaper Jammer. He pulled the trigger and fired the energy blaze straight at the device, incinerating it on impact. Two flashes of blue and purple sparks followed, lighting up the air and then floating gently onto the ground, the embers fading away with a crackle and smoke.

"That should take care of it."

John turned on his omni-tool and made a priority transmission to

Admiral Hackett's private comm channel. It took a few seconds to link up, but then Hackett appeared on a miniature vid-screen.

"Reporting sir!" said John with a salute.

"What's going on, Commander? You are an hour behind schedule, the _Normandy_ came back, but we were worried you had failed."

"There was heavy resistance at the Conduit, knocked me out for a little while, but I got back up."

"I see. Casualties?"

"Two, my shuttle pilot, and Spectre Alenko."

"I hate to say it, but that's actually good news, could have been a lot worse, could have easily lost the _Normandy_. Alright, I'm uploading the Citadel Arm Command Codes. With the council gone, the surviving Spectres have decided to allow you access to open up. Well done, we might win this yet."

"Aye sir," replied John.

He walked up to the far end of the room, in front of a large glass window. He approached a terminal and booted up the system, then input the code for the Citadel to open up. It took a second, but John saw the arms outside start to separate from each other like the petals of a flower.

A message came in from Hackett: MOBILIZING.

"What do we do now?" asked Cortana.

"Wait," was all John could say.

* * *

><p>Ten minutes passed, and John could see from the outside of the Citadel, the arrival of the combined fleets. They were massive, a huge collection of warships all moving in on him. If he hadn't known they were allies, then he might be a little fearful of such large amounts of firepower, as projectiles streamed in lines of blue and red across space. He saw the Reapers attempt to counter-attack, a swarm of squid-like ships heading in a diamond formation towards the brunt of the allied attack.<p>

"I hope the Normandy's alright up in there," said Cortana.

"Me too."

"Who would have ever thought we'd end up here?"

"I wouldn't have, that's for sure."

"What do you think we'll do once this is all over?"

"Well I don't see any way of us returning home so, I guess we'll find you a new body, and I'll just become a reserve soldier...or something."

"Don't want to settle down with Liara?"

"No, I couldn't just sit down and do nothing. Also, Liara will probably be busy repairing her home world, and her Information Broker activities. Our relationship will probably be short-lived."

"Well, I'll guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it," said Cortana finally.

John nodded.

Fifteen more minutes passed, and Hackett contacted him again saying, "We're moving with the Crucible, any resistance?"

"None so far."

"I find that odd," noted Cortana.

"What is?"

"You'd think the Reaper ground forces would try and retake this?"

John thought about, and realized that that didn't make sense.

"You don't think John...that the Reapers wanted the Alliance to build the Crucible?"

John hadn't thought about that possibility, "What do you mean?"

"Well, the Crucible plans were found in Prothean archives. But the Reapers destroyed the Protheans right? So what if the Reapers made the Crucible plans?"

"Why would they be guarding the Conduit though? And why would they guard this with everything they had?"

"I don't know. Lets just pray this works."

Finally, John saw the outline of a large, sphere-shaped device coming towards the Citadel. It moved on by like a great whale, the came to a stop, its arms latching onto the sides of the Citadel with ease.

"Here come the fireworks," said Cortana.

They waited.

Nothing happened.

"Um..."

"Commander...Commander!" shouted Hackett from the omni-tool.

"Yes, sir?"

"The Crucible...its not working, it has to be something on your end, look around and see what you can do, we've got engineers trying their best over here."

John immediately ran up to the terminal, but for the life of him, he had no idea what was the problem.

"Cortana, get in here and see what you can do."

He removed Cortana from his system, and plugged her into the terminal, waiting for a response of some kind. There was no holographic panel anywhere, so she'd have to let him know by other signals.

That's when everything started to change.

Underneath John, a pool of white light appeared, surrounding him in a circle. He was now enveloped by a shaft of the same light, and was rising steadily into the air. The top of the Citadel tower opened up and let him out into the open sky. He could see the lights of the Citadel arms on all sides now, and could watch as he traveled up the width of the Crucible's main structure, going higher and higher.

"This...is not good," John said to himself.

Whatever was happening, it was beyond his control.

After a few more moments of travel, John came up to the top of the Crucible. He was at the back of a long hallway, with no railings on either side. Therefore, John could see over the edge and look down at Earth. Above him were structural supports, and in front of him was a shaft of rippling blue energy that seemed to sizzle. On either side of the beam, were two structures. One seemed like a cryo-tube and glowed red, strange, smaller tubes sticking out of its body and into the sub-structure below. To the left, was another set of tubes, but instead of them coming from a larger tube, they came from a power conduit of some sort, that rippled with blue sparks between two metal coils.

And coming in John's direction was a ghostly blue figure...a figure that John had not seen in years.

"Arbiter?" asked John.

It was Thel Vadam, but it was not. It was like a hologram of it, only with more form, and an ethereal hollowness that seemed to make him glow.

"I...am something familiar...but I am not really it," replied the fake Arbiter.

"Who are you then?"

"I am the Catalyst."

John was unconvinced, "Really?"

"Yes."

"You wouldn't happen to know why this thing doesn't work do you?"

"It requires input...from its user."

"Alright, do you know how to set it to 'stop the Reapers' mode?"

"The Reapers are mine, I control them."

Another strange claim, "Really?"

"Yes, they are your test."

"Test?"

"Yes, the Reapers are the test to decide who is ready to inherit this Universe's Mantle."

John felt like he knew that term before, but he didn't know why. So he asked, "Mantle?"

"Yes, in all Universes, there must be one species, one apex race, that dictates the fate of all. They must take on the burden of responsibility, to shepherd the weaker races and guide them so that they will not destroy themselves."

"You're destroying them right now though."

"I am aware of what you are thinking, but you are incorrect, a product of your organic reasoning, which is naturally flawed."

John was taken aback, but merely replied, "Alright, explain to me what is right then."

"The Reapers are a test. We wait, until the galaxy's races have reached their apex. Then, we attack them, harvest them, as not to waste their genetic memories and experiences, and if one race were to manage to defeat us, then we would relinquish our control of the Mantle to them, and they would become the new rulers of the Mantle."

"For you see, this galaxy is one battleground, but this entire universe bends to our will. We merely use this galaxy in the same way a gardener might distill good qualities to make a quality crop. Unfortunately, we have been disappointed for a long, long time. Until now."

The horrific undertaking that the Reapers had done disgusted John, but he had to know more, "Until now?"

"Humanity was the first to unite the races together. They were the first to find our weaknesses, and the first to finish the Crucible. Unfortunately for your...Admiral Hackett...the Crucible is nothing more than a trap."

"A trap?"

"Yes, depending on your actions, will decide whether or not humanity...and your friends... survive."

John felt an enormous burden on his shoulders. How could he, who hadn't even come from this universe, make such a universe altering

decision?

"I..." began John.

"We know what you are. You are an Infinite, you are not from here. Did you really think you were the first?"

"No," lied John.

"Liar. We can see your mind, it is known to us. Soldier, forced to fight from the age of infancy, bonded in steel. There have been many who have traversed the barriers that separate the universes. We once knew of a female human, like yourself, that could cross through them at will, due to a splitting of her body between dimensions. So it makes no difference, in this decision, since you pledged yourself to fight."

John took a deep breath, then asked, "Alright, what are my choices?"

"We know you have thought about destroying us."

The Catalyst pointed at the Red tube.

"Why would you let that happen?"

"Because if you choose it, the Mass Relays will be destroyed, all Synthetic life will be killed, including your AI, Cortana, and this galaxy will be thrown back into the stone age."

"Oh."

"Think of it..as a reset button for life."

"If there are other Reapers out there, won't they not be destroyed?"

The Catalyst didn't answer for a moment then said... "That is a possibility, I would not be as foolish as to ask you to take our word for it that we would let you take up the Mantle in peace."

"Good."

"Do you think you can control us?"

The Catalyst pointed at the blue power couplings.

"How does that work?"

"You will transfer your energy into the Crucible, and your corporeal form will be dissolved. But your essence, your neural pathways, your 'soul' to use crude organic terms, will remain alive. And using it, you could command the Reapers."

"That's what the Illusive Man wanted."

"Yes, but he couldn't control us, because we already controlled him."

"No way am I choosing that one then."

The Catalyst, for a split second, seemed to grin, but it disappeared, "There is a third option."

"What?"

"We long ago created the power to bridge the gap between worlds. We have strained from using it, for we know our place. And there are worlds where the laws of the universe change, and where our physics and technology would be useless. But we could bring you back to where you belong."

"Really?"

"Yes, it would take some time though."

"Hm..."

"You have been given your options, now you must choose."

John stood there in silence, thinking over everything that the Catalyst had said, and he knew that this would be the hardest decision he would ever make.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: I got the idea for this ending when I read "Silentium" by Greg Bear, and when the Didact said, "The Mantle is not earned...it is taken!" To me, this would make a lot more sense than, "We are Synthetics created to kill organics so Synthetics won't kill the organics."

52. Ghosts of Reach

Brothers in Steel Part 51

Ghosts of Reach

* * *

><p>John continued to stand still for several minutes, going over the options available to him. On one hand, he had the ability to destroy the Reapers once and for all. But Cortana would die, as would the Geth, and billions of people would be stranded out in space...if the creature was telling the truth. If this thing was truly the leader of the Reapers it would of course be trying to make John question himself, and choose something less destructive to its kind. Putting your hands on two glowing shock rods was never a smart idea, but neither was shooting a red tube full of pulsing energy. But the fleets didn't have the time for his indecision.<p>

He ruled out going home. This was no time for cowardice. But this was such a hard choice, with so many unknowns, so much doubt, that he wished for once that somebody was around to order him what to do. But he was cut off from communications up here at the top of the Crucible, and no one was going to be able to activate the Crucible but him.

"Destroying the tube, will it truly destroy the Reapers?"

"Yes."

"How can I trust you?"

"You can't. But think about this. If we had wanted to destroy you outright, we could have. Even now, I could order my Reapers to converge, and then you would have to make a decision or perish. But you have passed all the tests, except for this. My programming remains absolute. I must let you choose our fate."

"You were programmed? By who?"

"The Reapers are the progeny of countless peoples. But we started as one, by a race of beings that inherited the Mantle. They created the first Reaper to start the cycle of choosing a successor. They did so and created me to wait, and analyze the data."

"You're nothing more than an AI then."

"In the same way in which you are nothing more than a mammal."

"I see."

"We await your decision."

There was only one choice now. John clenched his fists, his heart heavy with sorrow at what he must do. The Reapers must be destroyed, at any cost. The Sacrifice would be high, but at least all the people of the galaxy would be able to rebuild freely. If he chose to try and control, there was no guarantee he would retain his identity, and the Reapers would just be passed to a new master. And leaving, if such a thing could be done, well, that was not an option.

"I'm sorry, Cortana." He pulled out his pistol and walked up closer to the tube. He began to fire at the tube. Each time a shot scored the tube, red sparks would erupt from within and flash, John finally got close enough that he got a good target. The whole thing exploded, shards of glass falling to the ground and a puff of smoke flame appearing from within the tube. Red energy filled up the shaft of light that was between the two conduits of the Crucible. The Red light engulfed the whole area and bathed John inside it, until he too was red. Then it disappeared.

"What just happened?" he asked the Catalyst.

The Catalyst nodded and then said, "You passed the test."

"What?" John was confused and starting to feel weary.

"It was a final test of character. In order to have the mantle you must be willing to sacrifice, sacrifice millions, even billions, their hopes, their dreams, everything about them, in order to make sure life continues. That there will be a future. You were willing to sacrifice them, and that is the last bit of proof we need to know that humanity is ready for the trials that you will face."

"What trials?"

"Time will pass. You must assert dominance over the lesser beings. They will look to you for a firm hand, but will instinctively rebel against it. You must be the ones to give them the rod. That is all we can do. You may disagree, swear to never go against it, but it will happen. Goodbye, John Spartan."

The Catalyst turned to leave but John had one more question, "Wait! Where are you and the Reapers going?"

"To somewhere else where we're needed," was all the Catalyst replied with. Then, the intelligence faded away, its luminescent body disappearing in a shimmering haze.

For some reason, John felt sad. And alone.

But then, he snapped out of it when he heard the voice of Admiral Hackett on the comm, "Spartan! Commander Spartan! Are you getting this?"

"Commander Spartan reporting, sir, are you all right?"

"Never been better. Don't know what you did, but the Reapers are in full retreat, they're leaving the system!"

John couldn't believe it. The Catalyst had been true to its word.

The war was over.

53. Epilogue

A few of you guys didn't understand the ending, so I will pretty much break it down for you.

The original reason given in the original ending of Mass Effect 3 was shit. "We will destroy you with Synthetics, otherwise Synthetics will destroy you." Using the concept of the Mantle from the Forerunner trilogy books by Greg Bear, I decided to apply that as a trans-universal constant philosophy that exists everywhere; one race at any given time is in charge of safeguarding the protection of life in the universe. In this case, it was the Reapers, and they believed what they were doing was the right thing. So instead of them killing you because of Synthetics, they were using our galaxy as a twisted science experiment, until they could find the next one to take the mantle, while at the same time, keeping order in the galaxy by imposing the technology they wanted us to use. "You develop along the paths we desire."

**With the defeat of Sovereign in Mass Effect 1, the Reapers realized that humanity might be capable of becoming the next bearer of the Mantle. They tested their hypothesis with several tests, the first, in building the Human-Reaper, to see the results, and the second, by seeing if the humans could forcefully impose their will on the other species by creating a pan-species alliance, something that had never been done before. The Crucible was an elaborate trap, designed to focus all the races if this happened on one spot, in case humanity failed the final test...the individual test of sacrifice. **

****This test simply put, is a test to see if a random individual would be willing to make a hard choice, unlike any that had ever come before it. The "Destroy" option. Chief passed the test, and the Reapers were satisfied. The Reapers obey the Mantle and no other law, and therefore leave the galaxy so the human race will take their place.****

****That is the ending I used, and now, I present to you, My Fallout New Vegas style epilogue.****

* * *

><p>...And so it was that in the end, a man from another time, another place, was the one that broke the cycle that had constrained the life of the Milky Way Galaxy forever...<p>

...Spartan John-117 earned the Alliance's highest commendations, and for the next ten years would help rebuild the galaxy he now called home, starting at Earth, and moving on to Noveria and Benning. After that, he served for another five years as part of a Special Forces team dedicated to peacekeeping operations in the post-Reaper galaxy, until old age finally caught up with him, and he was forced to retire for good. He moved to Thessia, where for the remainder of his days, he lived with his lover Liara T'soni, and eventually died content in 2245, surrounded by his friends and loved ones, a rare occurrence for a Spartan...

...Liara T'soni continued her job as Shadow Broker for a while, and helped rebuild the galaxy with her networks. Once it was back in a fitful shape, she handed over her contacts and networks to her long-time friend, Feron, on the condition that he use them for good purposes. Liara then settled down on Thessia, supporting her boyfriend by working as a history professor at the Armali College of Xenosciences on Thessia. After the death of John, she eventually decided to go back to doing what she had been doing when Shepard had found her, isolating herself on many years of Prothean digs, trying to learn about those that came before her, until she disappeared and faded away into history...

...Cortana worked with John for the next fifteen years, then decided that she would return to live with the Geth. The Geth welcomed her with open arms, and she became absorbed into their collective fully. Eventually, as time passed on, Cortana realized the threat that humanity would become, and decided to aim the Geth on building their greatest project: an installation that would house all Geth consensus. Using a certain Forerunner object for aesthetic inspiration, it was built, and the Geth left the galaxy to parts unknown in 2401, leaving Rannoch in the complete possession of the Quarian peoples...

...Steve Cortez did not actually die on Ilos, instead was just shot down. When the Reapers left, he was stranded on Ilos for a year, until a passing Alliance ship recognized his presence, and picked him up. He was brought back to Earth and offered his own command, which he turned down. He worked as a pilot for another ten years, then settled down with a new husband, Jim, and they started a sky-car rental service on the Citadel...

...James Vega helped rebuild Earth for four years, and after making sure that his Uncle was set up comfortably, joined the N7 program.

After that, he successfully led a platoon of troopers known as "The Renegades" on peace-keeping operations in areas that had been overrun by pirates after abandoned by the Alliance. After his retirement, he settled down back in his home of Los Angeles, and opened up a tattoo parlor that saw successful business up until Vega's death in 2241...

...Garrus Vakarian helped out with the rebuilding on Earth for several years, then returned to Palaven to help out there, for an additional ten years. Eventually, Garrus returned to the Turian military. When Primarch Victus died, Garrus had risen high enough in the Primacy that he was given the job of Primarch, ruling for a good thirty years before he died peacefully in his home in 2240. He never married, never had children, and when asked about what he would have done different his answer was, "not a damn thing."...

...Tali Zorah vas Normandy returned with the migrant fleet to Rannoch, where she helped in the recolonization effort of the planet. With the help of the Geth and Cortana, they managed to create a Utopian paradise that rivaled the planets of the Citadel races. Eventually, the Quarians were given a spot on the council, along with the Krogan and Volus, and Tali Zorah was given the task of being the Quarian Councilor. She served admirably, and lived to retire comfortably on Rannoch. She never engaged in any sort of romantic relationship with anyone else however, writing in her memoirs, that Shepard was her one and only love...

...Legion went back to the Geth after helping rebuild on Earth and Palaven. He served as an infiltration unit, collecting information about the world outside and giving it back to the consensus. Eventually, he was replaced by new hardware, and was melted down...

...Urdrnot Wrex saw to the repopulation of Tuchanka, and ushered a new Krogan Golden Age. For hundreds of years he saw his people rise to power and prominence, gaining a seat on the Council. He fathered hundreds of children, and taught people the story of Shepard and John throughout the ages. However, towards the end of his life, he realized the threat that humans had become and feared that Krogan would need to reclaim their violent past in order to protect themselves...

...Urdrnot Grunt fought...

...Miranda helped rebuild Earth and several other colonies, until eventually she decided to settle down and became a teacher at Grissom Academy, lecturing students on the use of Biotic powers as well as gifted mathematicians and logicians. She eventually married, but never had any kids of her own, watching after her sister's quite often...

...Joker served as pilot of the Normandy for twenty more years, until he was forced to retire. EDI was given citizenship as well, and the two decided to move and live together on one of the Attican Beta colonies, where Joker collected the money from his vid royalty money. He starred in several documentaries, and wrote a book about his experiences as well. In the end though, his disease caused him to die at a younger age than most in 2230. After that EDI went to parts unknown, never to be seen again...

...The Reapers never returned. It is unknown where they went, and to this day, they remain a constant villain in the bedtime stories of children...

...**And so this story comes to a close**...

* * *

><p>I would like to thank everybody who read this and reviewed, and for those loyal fans, you know who you are. This has been a long effort, and its finally good to be done. I can without any doubt say that there are moments in this fic that are just awful, and I will not hide from the fact that I am not that great of a writer. However, I said I would finish it and I did, and I hope you all enjoyed it. Thank you, Gehenna79.<p>

End
file.